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ABSTRACT

A research study examined the complex roles of adult life in relation to the student role, the nature of adult undergraduate engagement in learning, and adult perceptions of involvement. Adult students were interviewed in three types of institutions: 38 at two liberal arts colleges, 29 at two community colleges, and 23 at two public universities. The entry and socialization of adults into undergraduate student roles was a complex phenomenon that varied for five groups: new entrants, reentrants with significant gaps in previous enrollment, reentrants in competitive colleges, reentrants in colleges similar to previous enrollment, and reentrants in unique adult degree programs. Their beliefs and actions about the student role were based on past educational and personal histories. Their beliefs about college learning and its relationship to other adult roles also varied, suggesting that no single organizational actions will influence learning for all adults. Their perspectives on student involvement were influenced by the following: value of the program/institution, desire for high quality education, the quality of academic learning, the support environment, and concerns about financial access. The student role had complex interactions with family, work, and community roles; family support was a critical component in student participation. Implications for research and for adult and higher education practice centered around three concepts: the adult as student learner; adult images of student involvement; and the adult undergraduate as family member, worker, and citizen. (Appendixes present each of the six institutional research sites as a case study, and include survey instruments and correspondence. Contains 87 references.) (YLB)

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FINAL PROJECT REPORT

Adult Undergraduate Students: Patterns of Learning Involvement

Carol E. Kasworm
Principal Investigator

Sally S. Blowers
Research Associate

JUNE, 1994

College of Education
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Knoxville, Tennessee 37996-3400

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This study has represented a special time in my faculty life. The original interest for this research grew out of an early curiosity observing adult learners in my classroom. It was nurtured through my fledgling doctoral research dissertation and was broadened through my work and involvements with the University of Houston-Clear Lake, an adult-oriented upper-division university. However, it took a place, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and my involvement in this land-grant institution to provide a supportive environment for conducting the research. It also was created through the excitement and energy of many interested adult students and of practitioners and researchers who serve these adult undergraduate learners. This study also became a reality due to financial support and scholarly acknowledgement. I owe a debt of gratitude for the support and encouragement of the United State Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

There are many individuals who were instrumental in this collaborative research effort. Much thanks goes to Ms. Sally Blowers, my research colleague and coauthor who was a mainstay for keeping good arguments, insights, and alternative perspectives bubbling. Both Sally and I owe a significant debt of time and patience to our respective husbands and families. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the College of Education and graduate students in the Adult Education program who provided support, critique, and genuine interest over this long period of research activity.

A special debt of thanks and good wishes goes to the many adult students who shared their lives and experiences with us in the interview process. Their commitment, dedication, and fervent desire for quality collegiate learning was profoundly touching. We also wish to express our special appreciation to the six institutional sites, our key institutional contact sources and a number of faculty and staff who also shared support, institutional space, and interest in this research process. We wish we could name each one of you and share with you our appreciation. Lastly, there were a variety of individuals who helped us in the mechanics of the study, the transcription work, the project management, and the many drafts and rewrites along the way to this final report. Each of you are valued for your support and your work. In particular, we wish to thank Ms. Carol Cook, Ms. Sue Carey, Ms. Lori McKeehan, Ms. Gale Brewer, Ms. Mary Kay Kramp, Dr. Grady Bogue, Dr. Larry Coleman, as well as our two main transcribers, Ms. Paula Hampton, and Ms. Sandy Puffenbarger.

May this study present vivid and helpful perspectives about the adult action and voice in the undergraduate experience. This study started from curiosity and passion and now is focused upon sharing a landscape of those adult undergraduate journeys. We welcome dialogue with you as you also journey in research and action in greater understanding of adult undergraduate students.

Chapter 1

Overview of the Research Study

INTRODUCTION

From the earliest of times in American higher education, adults have been enrolled as undergraduate students. Currently this segment of students, as defined by 25 years of age or older, represent over 44% of the enrollment in American undergraduate higher education. In the past, this group was often labeled as "nontraditional." They were viewed as an interesting oddity, as a patriotic commitment to serve world war veterans, or as a misfit for collegiate work. However, the times—they are a changing. The presence of adult undergraduate students represent an important adaptation both for adult life and for collegiate structures.

Adult undergraduate learners represent one segment of a "learning society" in which highly specialized and credentialed knowledge is becoming the norm for entry and continuance in work life and career pursuits. Adults participate in undergraduate higher education because they require a significant, quality education focused upon current knowledge and conceptual thinking. They seek collegiate education in response to the impact of dramatic and continuous knowledge growth on their lives and their work. However, as dramatic as this need and the increasing adult representation in higher education, little substantive research has been conducted. We know little of the uniqueness of these individuals and the ways in which collegiate institutions facilitate or do not support their learning.

This research study explored three important research concerns related to the adult learner in an undergraduate setting. It examined the complex roles of adult life in relation to the student role, the nature of adult undergraduate engagement in learning, and adult perceptions of involvement in three different collegiate institutional contexts—public community college, public university, and adult degree programs in a private liberal arts college. As a qualitative inquiry, it focused upon diverse adult undergraduate students to illuminate and understand the complexity of the lived experiences and the meaning of these experiences for adult undergraduates.

This research report presents the key findings and experiences of a select group of adult undergraduates from this study. To aid the reader, we note the following chapter content organization. This chapter will present the background to the study, research design, methodology and data analysis procedures. The nature of adult learning engagement within the undergraduate classroom context will be examined in Chapters Two and Three. Chapter Two will present beliefs and experiences of entry and socialization of the adult into the student role, as well as key personal influences upon the student role. Chapter Three will focus on the classroom transaction and related learning processes for adult students, as well as present adult undergraduate actions and beliefs about the connections between classroom learning with other adult life roles. Adult learner perceptions of involvement in relation to three different collegiate institutional contexts—public community college, public university, and adult degree programs in a private liberal arts college—will be discussed in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five, the interrelationship of an adult student role to other adult life roles as spouse, parent, worker, and community citizen will be explored. And the final chapter, Chapter Six, will focus upon key findings and implications of this study for both the researcher and practitioner communities. In addition, each of the six collegiate institutional research sites is presented as a case study located in Appendices A through F, with additional background information in the remaining appendices.

ORIGINS OF THE STUDY

How can researchers and practitioners understand both the nature of the adult undergraduate and the variations of collegiate response to this diverse grouping? Past research examining adult undergraduates has represented highly distinct and narrowly focused concerns. There have been two general paths of investigation in this past research: a) comparison of younger and older adult undergraduates in a young adult context; and b) examination of adult undergraduates as a special sub-population.

Overview of Past Research

Comparison of Younger and Older Adults in a Young Adult Context

This path of research has been the major focus of continued discussion among higher education researchers. Although varied comparative behaviors and characteristics of younger and older student have been a topic of examination, the key perspective of this research has drawn upon the young adult undergraduate experience as the template to measure the abilities and appropriateness of adult undergraduate students. Most of these past research efforts have been anchored in a concept of adult undergraduates as a homogeneous subgroup in comparison to younger undergraduates. As a result, rather skewed discussions compared younger students, ages 17-25 (8 year span of difference) with adults ages 25-60 (35 year span of difference). Other early investigations focused upon the potential mental inferiority of the aging adults; this belief assumed that older adults (25-60 years of age) were less capable of academic excellence. In addition, earlier conceptions of adult students were based in the judgement of adults as inferior and limited because they had not come directly out of high school. These early conceptions of adult academic abilities assumed that work, family, and life experiences fundamentally diminished cognitive abilities and affective readiness for collegiate education (Kasworm, 1990a). In another line of collegiate research, there was an established standard for collegiate impact based upon the student investment in the student role, e.g., a full-time student status provided a more valuable impact than a part-time student status (Astin, 1985). This standard also assumed that an undergraduate student should have no major life responsibilities to interfere with the learning role and the developmental journey towards independent adulthood. It assumed that college life functioned as an implicit parameter, creating a developmental "holding environment" for the undergraduate. Academic learning was viewed as the key task of undergraduate adult life, alongside young adult developmental tasks. Thus, adults who had limited involvement in both the traditional curriculum as well as the collegiate extra curriculum were not fully immersed within academic learning. Further, the adult focus upon work, community and family made them marginal and less significant, with the related assumption that they were weaker and less capable of experiencing and demonstrating quality undergraduate learning outcomes.

Examination of Adult Undergraduates as a Distinct Sub-Population

There has been limited research examining the culture of the adult undergraduate in relation to a particular collegiate institutional context. Although numerous institutional studies have described specific demographic characteristics of adult undergraduates, these studies have not attempted to identify the interaction between the institutional culture and the adult student population. In this area of research, two efforts have provided perspective. One effort focused on the structural characteristics of the institution in relation to the adult student; another research effort attempted to describe the historical development of access for adults into undergraduate education.

In describing varied traditional collegiate structures, the literature suggests four different types of structural relationships between adult students and collegiate institutions (Ackell, et al., 1982; Apps, 1981, 1988; Hall, 1991; Kasworm, 1993a). *Type A institutions* represent an increasing number of colleges and universities which have altered their mission, academic curriculum and organization to better serve adult learners. Through age-integrated structures, policies and programs, these institutions provide ease of access and support involvement by adult students. *Type B institutions* have created a predominant adult-oriented collegiate environment. These institutions represent a new kind of collegiate institution reflecting innovative adult-oriented collegiate higher education. These institutions focus their mission upon adult students by: a) offering courses and programs at night and on the weekend, b) expecting participation to be on a part-time basis or from a distance, c) providing portfolio assessment for academically equivalent credit for life experiences/training/certification, d) designing learning experiences which integrate work experiences with collegiate learning, and e) crafting specialized degree programs solely for adult students. *Type C institutions* by design, if not by official mission, focus solely upon the young, full-time, day-time students. A subset of these youth-oriented institutions have created a peripheral organization, such as a Division of Continuing Education or Adult College, which serves the adult learner but not as an integral member of the academic mission of the institution. *Type D institutions* usually represent institutions which view the adult student as a limited add-on to their main mission of serving young adults 17-24 years of age. These institutions allow adult access to programs and experiences designed and offered for younger adults. These institutions do not actively solicit adult students and are likely to leave unspoken any policies or individual efforts which serve adults.

Some researchers have attempted to categorize adult undergraduates based upon the nature of their historical involvement in higher education (Hall, 1991; Portman, 1978; Shannon & Schoenfeld, 1965). However, these efforts have had limited success, due to the highly diverse settings, interactions and attitudes regarding adult access. With a few exceptions, adult access to undergraduate experience has come from support through individual efforts and institutionally unique programs as opposed to institution-wide mandates, or state and national policies.

In a somewhat loose categorization, five waves of increased adult involvement in higher education have been identified. However, these discussions have traditionally side-stepped the significant public myth that adults have only recently sought out undergraduate education. Often individuals would point to the return of the World War II veteran as the start of adult participation in higher education; however, these veterans were not the first wave of adults who became undergraduate students. Prior to the Civil War, there had been active participation of adults in colonial undergraduate colleges (Allmendinger, 1975; Burke, 1982).

The first serious representation, the first wave of adult undergraduates came at the turn of the 20th century. During this era, policies, structures, and programs were established to support adult access. These activities were initiated through the Land-Grant movement which created "democracy colleges," through the development of community and municipal colleges, and the dramatic expansion of extension outreach through credit correspondence courses, evening classes, extension degrees, and other educational innovations (Dyer, 1956; Eckelberry, 1932; Portman, 1978; Reber, 1915; Shannon & Schoenfeld, 1965).

Between World War I and II, the second wave of growth focused upon more specialized programs and activities. Often these efforts had earlier beginnings; however, during this era these activities became a more predominant form serving sizeable numbers of adults. These key additions targeted adult undergraduates through women's programs, teachers' institutes, summer schools, labor education courses, and industrial/vocational training for adults.

The "GI Bill" of World War II and the Korean War had a profound impact on adult enrollments and colleges and universities. This third major wave of adult enrollment represented a significant increase in mature students and led to national visibility for adult students in undergraduate education. The majority of youth-oriented collegiate institutions also opened their doors to this new kind of student and discovered that these students brought a different set of motivations, beliefs about learning, and values for college education. Many institutions viewed this influx of WWII veterans as a temporary effort and quickly reverted back to youth-only environments. However, there were a few institutions who valued this change and continued to support adult access. These institutions joined a number of colleges and universities who had extension programs, evening courses, and correspondence work for adults prior to the war.

The fourth wave of enrollment was not as dramatic as the GI bill veterans, representing thirty years of steadily increasing enrollments of adults. This growth from 18% in 1947 to 34.7% in 1978 (undergraduate and graduate population of 25 years old and above) was a response to increased access, special programs or delivery systems (Kasworm, 1980). One of these major developments in this time period was the enhanced outreach through special women's entry courses and women's centers. Another major effort targeted business and industry with academic programs directed to full-time workers through co-sponsorship or contractual programs offered at the work site. During this era, external degree programs, DANTES and CLEP were also developed. These nontraditional formats and assessments supported many of the unique life circumstances and experiences of adult learners.

In the 1980's, the fifth wave of enrollment focused upon unique programs designed solely for adults, upon technological innovations in distance learning, and upon collaborative academic programs between colleges and business, industry, or professional associations. For example, television, satellite, and computer networking have dramatically altered the options for adult access to collegiate learning. In addition, there have been a number of public and private institutional innovations with a dominant mission to serve working adults, such as Empire State College, Thomas Edison State College, Community College of the Air Force, National Technological University, Electronic University, corporate colleges, and a proliferation of adult degree programs.

Although these five waves have reflected a broad notion of the development of higher education in relation to the adult undergraduate, this categorization has not readily provided an understanding of the guiding beliefs for these actions. One salient voice, Dr. James Hall of Empire State College, suggested three guiding themes for these innovations and increased adult access: egalitarianism, individualism, and pluralism (Hall, 1991). Collegiate institutions for the past 100 years have adapted and created policies, structures and procedures to assure equity and provide pluralistic access to cultural, social and economic subgroupings. Academic programs sensitive to these concerns have become more individualistic and have targeted adult needs and life circumstances. In addition, higher education policies have changed in the belief that any qualified individual, young or old, should have opportunities to gain advanced knowledge and become a better educated citizen, worker, and family leader through collegiate involvement.

These themes and collegiate adaptations are not just a uniquely American phenomenon. Many other nations have also recognized the importance of lifelong learning and recurrent education focused upon advanced knowledge development embedded in adult higher education. For example, in a recent study of international activities, the United States ranked fifth in percentage of adult undergraduate enrollment across the world [ranking in order: Sweden (65.9%), China (49%), Finland (47.2%), Norway (45.0%), USA (41%), Australia (40.3%), Canada (37.0%), United Kingdom (31.8%), Israel (30.7%)] (Kasworm, 1993a). These current international activities, as well as other recent collegiate commitments to adult undergraduates, are noteworthy.

Research Framework

This research study explored several key questions regarding the nature of adult undergraduates, the nature of adult beliefs about learning in a collegiate setting, and the nature of adult beliefs about involvement and participation in the undergraduate experience. Three background context frameworks were used in designing the study: a) the undergraduate learning context framework; b) the adult life context framework; and c) the institutional context framework.

Undergraduate Learning Context

How do adults perceive their learning engagement within an undergraduate environment? Given the limited base of knowledge about adult undergraduate involvement in classroom learning, this study focused upon adult learner beliefs and actions in the undergraduate learning context. This study assumed that identifying learners' beliefs about involvement and engagement in the learning process would significantly contribute to an understanding of the adult undergraduate learning process. This study cast a wide net to consider both classroom and life learning, both formal and self-directed learning in the context of typical adult lives. These considerations were informed by the theoretical work of Vygotsky which emphasized activity theory and social constructivism, as well as other research in intellectual development focused upon the epistemology of knowledge and self-meaning constructions. In addition, this examination considered Astin's involvement theory, Rogoff and Lave's work on situated cognition (Rogoff & Lave, 1984; Lave & Wenger, 1991), and adult learning theory including andragogy and self-directed learning (Candy, 1991; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

In particular, the activity theory of Vygotsky was an important study framework because it considers the life-world role activities of the adult as the units of analysis. In this theoretical foundation, life activities are assumed to be influenced as adults choose actions based on constructed personal meaning. Thus, this perspective directed the study's examination of the life-world context of the adult, the interactions among the adult roles and their relationships with the student role, and the nature of adults' perceived life meanings as they engaged in undergraduate education (Kasworm, 1990b). Activity theory suggested that adult student learning is a reflection of the entire learner social system; "adult students are examples of centrifugal growth, of academic growth towards outward roles and experiences" (Kasworm, 1990, p. 366). Thus, this study examined the adult student's perspectives of his or her multiple activity roles of worker, family member, community member and adult learner as they interacted and influenced the student role and the construction of the internal cognitive meanings. It was believed that adult learners made meaning of the undergraduate experience as they engaged in these roles. These perspectives were grounded in the work of Rogoff and Lave (1984) and the more recent work of Lave and Wenger (1991) on everyday and situated cognition and learning. This recent research and theory assumed the importance of the learner's role in the learning process and of the understanding of meaning and application of learning across the adult life context beyond the collegiate classroom. The study also drew upon additional research in undergraduate learning focused upon the epistemology of knowledge, intellectual development, and meaning-making constructions. These research considerations included the work of Bruner (1986), Perry (Chickering & Associates, 1981), Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule (1985), Baxter-Magolda (1992), and others. These perspectives presented the social constructivist framework and suggested the implicit relationship between intellectual development and specific kinds of cognitive and affective experiences which challenge personal meanings of self and world.

The study also drew upon the theoretical work of Astin (1985) and recent research by Kuh et al. on involving colleges (1991). These writings suggested that quality undergraduate education occurs as a function of both an individual's involvement in undergraduate higher education and the interaction of that educational environment with the cognitive structures, beliefs, and actions of the undergraduate student. A college student's cognitive and maturational growth was hypothesized to be directly influenced by the quality, intensity and duration of undergraduate on-campus experiences. This research investigation revisited and modified Astin's and Kuh et al.'s perspectives by exploring notions of student involvement and supportive collegiate environments from the adult learner's perspectives of an undergraduate collegiate experience. This revised perspective focused upon the dynamics of adult student psychological involvement [as opposed to physical presence, or time commitments] in relation to beliefs and actions in the undergraduate institutional context.

Adult learning and self-directed learning theory also provided an important background perspective. Adult undergraduates bring a wealth of experiences, a diversity of past academic skills and knowledge, and a unique set of psychosocial requirements into the classroom learning environment (Cross, 1981; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). Although adult students may share similar participation patterns in collegiate classrooms with younger undergraduates, their internal cognitive and psychological perspectives on learning were assumed to be different. In particular, the study explored how adult students "made meaning" of the class content and their beliefs about past academic knowledge, life knowledge and student role knowledge in shaping those meanings. The study also examined ways that these adults attempted to utilize their life experiences, work, family, and citizen involvements in relation to their current academic learning experiences. The study sought reports of their learning actions in the classroom, selected learning actions outside the classroom, and their notions of classroom learning in relation to their current life involvements. Did these adult learners bring their life experiences of work, family, and community roles into the classroom? How did these experiences function in that setting in relation to academic knowledge? How did adult undergraduates access, understand, and master academic knowledge?

Adult Life Contextual Framework

This study examined adult undergraduate learners "in situ"—as collegiate students who also maintained major personal and societal initiatives through their other roles of worker, family member, and community citizen. Past research on adult students and related adult roles was examined, as well as related research on role adaptation and role conflict of adult students (Kasworm, 1990a). However, limited use was made of this research due to its predominant focus upon women, and specifically upon re-entry homemakers into collegiate life.

Because of limited prior research on key influencers of adult roles and adult life context on undergraduate student life, the study desired to create an interview pool of adults who would more likely reflect the common qualities of societal-defined adulthood: economic independence from parental sources; autonomy of identity; past opportunity to make personal societal contributions through work, family, and community leadership; as well as a clear separation or interruption between past high school or early collegiate work and their current collegiate participation. It was assumed that such a spectrum of complexity in adult lives would likely occur with adult undergraduates who were at least 30 years of age. It was recognized that the characterization of "adult student" was not a specific age category. However, this lower age limit of 30 was used as a sampling definer to focus on a pool of individuals who had a higher probability of adult life commitments, developmental maturity, and participation in the broader world prior to becoming an adult undergraduate.

Past research on adult undergraduates has often drawn upon student samples with adult undergraduates representing ages of 23, 25, or 27 and above. The selection of specific chronological age segmentation was made with the assumption that the researcher could appropriately define the differences between young and older adulthood based solely upon grouping students by age. However, in previous pilot studies conducted by the project director, this distinction was challenged. A subgroup of adult students between the ages of 25 and 27 in these studies presented themselves as traditional younger undergraduates in their actions and beliefs through full-time study and a world-view based solely within their college experiences. These students had not assumed major adult roles of full-time worker, spouse, parent, or contributing citizen, nor had they experienced a clear separation between past academic involvement as their major life focus and academic involvement as one of many adult life roles. Given these findings, this study defined the research sample beginning with a lower age limit of 30 to increase the likelihood of gathering a pool of individuals who represented the societal conception of an adult.

Each participant in this study was considered a hypothetical representative of a subgroup of adult undergraduates, representing some of the diverse characteristics and circumstances of a larger group of adult undergraduate learners. This diversified sample was expected to illuminate a beginning landscape portrait of these various characteristics and life contexts of adult undergraduates. It was believed that this diversity would influence adult presuppositions and assumptions regarding the student role. Moreover, these diverse experiences might also influence the perceptual lens through which the adult undergraduate student viewed and acted upon academic life.

This study gathered a perceptual narrative profile of each student's educational journey in relation to other adult life activities and previous experiences and involvements in schooling and collegiate work. The study also gathered descriptions of current involvements and commitments to spouse, family, work, and community roles. Each adult interviewee highlighted those elements of past and present life, of commitments and desires which were of significance in the life journey and important in terms of their current participation in undergraduate work. In addition, each adult was asked to speak to his/her goals for undergraduate work, related motivations, and future plans upon completion of the degree.

Institutional Context Framework

To understand adult undergraduate involvement in higher education, the study was also concerned with the collegiate setting and specific institutional contexts of the adult learner. Past undergraduate research using person-environmental interaction theories suggested that a particular institutional context attracts certain kinds of students; that there can be an optimized learning environment based in person-environment congruence; and that particular perceptual environmental factors influence the individual's psychosocial development (Feldman & Newcomb, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). No prior research had examined adult undergraduates and institutional settings for person-environment interactions. At best, there had been limited institutional research which suggested perceptual differentiation among adult undergraduates concerning initial entry and access to "adult learner friendly" programs or institutional structures (i.e., adult degree programs, liberal arts degrees for adults, weekend colleges). There have also been numerous studies of adult satisfaction and need for institutional support services (Apps, 1981, 1988; Cross, 1981). Perhaps the more helpful research for practitioners and educational researchers focused upon the adult beliefs and attitudes concerning participation and initial entry. Cross (1981) offered a helpful summary of these major models of adult participation and suggested a different model, the COR (Chain of Response) Model. Later work has built upon these discussions, yet continues to focus upon specific aspects of the process of entry and adaptation, upon specific institutional contexts, or upon specific learner groups (Blowers, 1993; Kasworm, 1993b). Within the higher education community, other streams of discussion have been concerned about student retention and involvement in undergraduate education, but continue to focus upon the traditional young adult undergraduate. Lastly, there has been a growing dialogue targeted to the influence of evening and weekend programs, programs designed for part-time learners, and unique adult-sensitive support services as they influence adult access and participation (Kasworm, 1993b). These more recent discussions suggest that an institutional environment which values adult students provides environmental supports, personnel, and policies based on the belief that adults "matter" (Schlossberg et al., 1989). While these varied perspectives and discussions may have informed and shaped institutional actions, there has been limited research to either describe current institutional environments experienced by adult students or to consider the impact of these environments upon adult undergraduates and their learning.

This study was designed to explore the adult learner perceptions of the institutional context and potential interactions. Six institutions were selected for the study, representing two institutions in each of three categories of postsecondary education: public universities; public community colleges; and private liberal arts colleges with an adult degree program. These six collegiate organizations reflected both similarities within each institutional category, as well as highly different histories of adult enrollment and institutional actions supportive of adult student needs and requirements.

Selection of specific institutions was based upon a desire to examine adult learner and undergraduate institution interactions in two different geographic sites. One geographic site was representative of a smaller city and rural/suburban environment with a service area of 335,000 population. The second geographic site represented an urban setting with the central city of 400,000 and surrounding service area of 1,200,000. These geographic sites were chosen purposefully because adults in the two geographic areas might perceive higher education and their involvement in differing ways due to varying social and economic conditions. Each site was also purposefully chosen because of the presence of each of the three categories of institutions in close proximity to one another. It was assumed that adult learners selected, participated, and defined their involvement based upon their personal perspective of the institution and themselves.

This study further assumed that participation could well be influenced by the nature of the institutional program, the nature of a particular academic major within the institution, as well as the particular characteristics of the undergraduate student. As noted by many previous studies, one major layer of this institutional selection process reflected the learner's predominant concerns for access, location, cost, convenience, and scheduling. However, the study also believed learners' decisions were influenced by the perceived qualities of the institution and the academic program, in relation to the nature of the student role. When adult students had a choice of institutions, what factors informed their choice for continuance and what did they value about their current institution of choice? Thus, the study explored the students' selection of a particular institution, their beliefs about their involvement and their own characterizations of the most salient qualities of that environment. Unlike the younger college student, it was also assumed that the perception of the institutional context would be a more complex set of characterizations. It was probable that many of the adult students would have had prior enrollments in other collegiate institutions, and might also, particularly in the case of a community college adult student, project future involvement in an upper-level institution. It was also assumed that the majority of adult undergraduates were "place-bound" due to work, family, and life circumstances. Thus, the selection process of an institution was framed by their adult life context.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This research study was framed to examine three broad areas of engagement and involvement of adult learners in American higher education. The major research questions included:

> **How do adults describe their learning engagement in the classroom and its relationship to their broader life involvements?**
>
> **How do adults describe their perceptions of involvement in a public community college, public university, or private liberal arts adult degree program environment?**
>
> **What common patterns and themes of involvement reflect the adult undergraduate experience in relation to the context of their family, work, and community roles and responsibilities?**

Research Framework

Naturalistic Inquiry Design

This study was framed by a naturalistic inquiry process. This qualitative approach sought to illuminate the adult undergraduate sense of understanding and meaning of the experience. As stated by Patton, the function of qualitative research is:

> to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself...to understand the nature of that setting—what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting—and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting...The analysis strives for depth of understanding. (Patton, 1985, p. 1)

This study was not framed in the belief that a single reality exists for all adult undergraduates or for all collegiate undergraduate institutions. Rather, it was assumed that there were multiple realities of the adult learner and of institutional environments which serve adult undergraduates. These realities were constructed in an interactive and dynamic fashion. Clearly, these realities were context-bound; they reflected the particularized experiences, perceptions and interactions of a person in an environment. Further, these realities were time-bound. Thus, this study presented the here and now of individuals and their life contexts at the time of the research study. Finally, this study also assumed that adult involvement in higher education not only influenced the adult learner, it also interacted and influenced the academic environment and its personnel. This set of multiple realities and interactions was the focus of the study, rather than a determination of cause-and-effect relationships (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study presented descriptive portraits of the adult undergraduate landscape, common themes, patterns and perceptual beliefs amongst adult undergraduates in varied collegiate settings.

The naturalistic inquiry gathered case study interviews, highly rich narratives of the adults' own sense of meaning and actions as learners, as undergraduate students, and as adults who maintained work, family, and community role involvements. A semi-structured interview format was utilized in order to ascertain the emic perspective. Each participant was considered as an individual case of the adult undergraduate experience. Common themes and categories suggesting specific descriptive ways in which the adult participated in the structures and processes of adult undergraduate life were developed for each institutional site.

The emergent design of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) included: creation of a research team, development of the interview protocol, formal entry of the team at each of the six research sites, sampling strategy, collection of site-based case study data, conduct of interviews, and subsequent data analysis. Data analysis included cross-case analysis within each site, between sites and across sites.

Creation of the Research Team

The study was conducted by a research team composed of Dr. Carol Kasworm, principal investigator and professor of Adult Education with a joint appointment in the Department of Technological and Adult Education and the Department of Educational Leadership, and Ms. Sally Blowers, co-researcher and doctoral student in Adult Education in the Department of Technological and Adult Education. In addition, special assistance was provided by Dr. Diana Venters, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Ms. Lydia Meek, Department of Educational Leadership, Ms. Sue Carey, Editor for the College of Education, and the principal transcribers, Ms. Pauline Hampton and Ms. Sandy Puffenbarger. Assistance was also provided by numerous individuals at each of the institutional sites, which included key personnel who significantly facilitated the project activities and helped to manage logistics.

Development of the Interview Protocol

Each participant interview followed a semi-structured protocol of questions. The questions were developed using the research objectives in relation to past research, from the guiding research frameworks, and from the foundational case study research of adult undergraduates (Kasworm, 1988a, 1988b, 1991, 1992). Key segments of the main interview included:

- Background information and current life commitments;
- Educational journey (past educational involvement from the point of high school exit to present enrollment, reasons for entry or exit of an institution and key experiences at each institution attended);
- Key positive and negative life forces, motivations and goals related to education;
- Key social support systems;
- Classroom experiences (classroom actions, professor/student actions, perspectives on grades/testing, perceptions of characteristics of older and

younger students; actions toward mastering subject matter);

- Relationship of student role to worker/family/community roles and self-directed learning activities;
- Suggestions to improve the institution's ability to serve adult students; and
- Any future plans for advanced higher education.

Each of the protocol question areas was open-ended. The interviewer would initiate a major probe question into a broad area of concern, while providing the opportunity for the interviewee to present his or her own sense of meaning perspective and personal insight concerning learner, student, and adult life roles. In each interview, there was additional probing for unique life experiences and insights, for illumination and clarification of learners' perspectives, and special questioning to elaborate on learner perspectives of characteristics, background experiences, or current involvements in the undergraduate setting. The research team reexamined the interview protocol at a number of points in the study. This reexamination occurred after the first five interviews at the first site, after completion of all interviews at the first site, after completion of the second site, and after completion of the third site. This reexamination considered the particular wording of initial probes, special institutional characteristics which influenced the adult students and would potentially require specific probes, and other concerns for initial themes which should be explored for further illumination through the protocol. (Appendix K presents the final revision of the interview protocol.)

Access to Institutional Sites

Two geographic locations, each encompassing three different postsecondary institutions in close proximity, were selected for the research. These three types of institutions included private liberal arts colleges with adult degree programs, public community colleges, and public universities. For each institutional site, an official representative of the institution and the principal investigator initially met to discuss the nature of the proposed research project, and the specific involvement and support sought from the institution in the project. In addition, at this meeting the protection of anonymity for both students and sites was discussed, as well as the projected research outcomes. Each institution was supportive of the project.

A specific institutional contact person was designated for all activities related to the study. In the case of the two private liberal arts colleges, the key person who assisted in on-site project coordination was the coordinator/director of the adult degree program. At the two community colleges, the key person who coordinated on-site research activities was the director of institutional research. At the two public universities, the initial contact was made through the dean of students, with subsequent on-site support given by the director of nontraditional services/re-entry students.

To provide anonymity, each of the institutions, their programs and staff, as well as the geographic locations, were given pseudonyms. The naming of each site was done alphabetically according to the date of site interviews. Sites included the following:

Adult Degree Programs in Private Liberal Arts Colleges

- **Allerton College** - a private liberal arts college with an adult degree program enrollment of 275. Adult student interviewees were in an upper-division, adult degree major in applied organizational management located at an extension site in West City. The program featured an accelerated curriculum (upper-level degree work done in a 15-month lock-step sequence of one course every 5-6 weeks). Students entered in groups of 12-15 per cohort. Each cohort experienced coursework together directed by practitioner instructors. Each class had a weekly one-night class experience of four hours and a required small study group meeting of 3 to 5 students for four hours, totalling eight hours per week of meeting time. The program also featured portfolio assessment of academically equivalent life experiences and a senior's research project. (Note Appendix A - Case Study of Allerton College.)
- **Charles College** - a private liberal arts college of 1620 enrollment, with an administratively distinct adult degree college, Adult Alternative College, which had 520 adults enrolled in undergraduate studies. Charles College is located in a large urban environment of Edwardsville. Upper-division adult degree majors in business, accounting and computer information systems were interviewed. These students experienced both a liberal arts undergraduate core and a professional major upper-level. Courses were offered in a semester format either in the evenings or on the weekends. (Note Appendix C - Case Study of Charles College.)

Community College College-Transfer Program

- **Bayville Community College** - a public community college of 7,800 students located near West City with a predominant enrollment in technical degree areas. Adult students in various lower-division degree concentrations of the college's transfer program were interviewed. All interviewees had completed 15 hours of credit coursework, as well as any developmental studies requirements. (Note Appendix B - Case Study of Bayville Community College.)
- **Elmwood Community College** - a public community college with a predominant technical degree focus and a student enrollment of 30,000, located in a major city center of Edwardsville. Adults in the college transfer program in varied lower-division degree concentrations were interviewed. These adults had completed at least 15 hours of credit coursework, as well as any developmental studies requirements. (Note Appendix E - Case Study of Elmwood Community College.)

Public University

- **Delta University** - a public university as of 1965, it offers undergraduate and master's programs with limited doctoral study and has a total enrollment of 15,400. Located on the northern side of Edwardsville, the university has a limited history of targeting services to adult students, but currently offers a support services office for nontraditional students. Seven curricula are offered in the evening hours. A mix of lower- and upper-division adult students representing nine academic majors were interviewed. (Note Appendix D - Case Study of Delta University.)

- **Fremont University** - a public university with a land-grant charter since 1896, Fremont has a current enrollment of 25,000. It offers a comprehensive mission with over 300 degree programs and master's, professional and doctoral programs. The university has a long history of serving adult undergraduate students through the evening school and through correspondence instruction. The evening school offers basic lower-division courses and electives for most four-year degree programs and also offers bachelor degrees to be completed in the evening in 15 majors. The university has recently developed an office for re-entry and nontraditional students. A mix of lower- and upper-division adult students representing 12 majors were targeted. (Note Appendix F - Case Study of Fremont University.)

At each of the sites, the research team met before and during the adult student interviews with institution personnel. These meetings established continued support for the study on-site; the logistics related to entry and access to the institution, students, and student enrollment rosters; background information on the institution and the nature of any unique programs or services for adult students; and, at some sites, contact with academic personnel who had special interest in adult students and the study.

Sample Selection

Interviewees for the study were identified through a purposeful sampling strategy congruent with qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The initial defining characteristics for the sampling pool were adult students who: a) were currently enrolled as undergraduates, b) were at least 30 years of age, c) were in good academic standing according to their institution's criteria, d) were currently enrolled in a baccalaureate degree program or had selected an academic major in a college transfer program at the community college, and e) had completed at least 15 hours of academic coursework beyond any developmental studies requirements.

Each site developed a current enrollment roster of all students who met the above sampling criteria. A more limited pool of potential interviewees was created based upon the purposeful selection of individuals who were likely to represent the greatest diversity among the adult undergraduate population available at these institutions. Efforts were made to balance representation according to gender; age; ethnicity/race; varied hours of enrollment (part-time to full-time); varied levels of academic status (freshman, sophomore, junior or senior) in relation to the nature of the institution or program; and varied academic majors. In addition, the interviewee's home address in relation to the site location was considered, since possible differences in access might be due to commuting distance between home and collegiate setting.

In the case of the two community colleges, the study only considered those individuals who had already completed all developmental studies coursework and were participating in college-level academic courses. In the case of the two private liberal arts college adult degree programs, the study only focused upon adult undergraduates who were in similar academic programs (applied organizational management at one institution, and business, accounting, and computer information systems in the second). In most cases, the institutionally-generated enrollment roster provided the above requested information, as well as mailing address, home phone number, and, at certain collegiate institutions, an office phone number. At the two adult degree program institutional sites, ethnicity, gender, current hours enrolled, and academic status were not noted on the enrollment roster. In addition, at Allerton, student age was not noted. To assist in the sampling process at these two adult degree program sites, ethnicity was subsequently identified for the large pool of potential interviewees by the director/coordinator of the adult degree program. In addition, at both private college sites, prior completion of a baccalaureate degree was not part of their data base. In the final interview sample for the adult degree programs, there were three individuals who were below the age of 30 and five who had already received a baccalaureate degree. These discrepancies from the study's sampling definers were identified at the time of the interview (see following discussion of the interview process). In examining the interview transcripts for these individuals, the researchers did not find any highly unique or discrepant meaning frameworks which would suggest that these individuals did not meet the framework assumptions of the study. Therefore these eight interviews were included in the study analysis.

The study team interviewed a total of 93 adults. This report presents findings from 90 of the interviews. Three of the interviews were eliminated in the analysis. Two were lost due to technical problems with recording. In addition, after careful review and analysis of the third transcript, it was determined that the interviewee had presented highly inconsistent and contradictory information throughout the interview. The coding of the interview reflected highly inconsistent meanings and conflicting themes. This third interview was also removed from the analysis.

Each institution was initially assigned a specific sample size, in an effort to gather a sufficient number of diverse cases, given specific public/private settings, academic majors, and levels of academic standing. The breakdown of the final 90 interview cases by site included:

Public Community College - College Transfer Program -
  Total of 29 *lower-division students:*
    Bayville Community College N = 15 students
    Elmwood Community College N = 14 students
Private Liberal Arts College, Adult Degree Program -
  Total of 38 *upper-division students:*
    Allerton College N = 20 students
    Charles College N = 18 students

Public University -

Total of 23 *lower and upper-division students:*

Delta University N = 10 students

Fremont University N = 13 students

The study was approved through the Use of Human Subjects in Research Committee at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and was also reviewed and approved by either a committee or a key academic representative at each of the six data collection sites. Each institutional site supported procedures for the protection of individual and institutional anonymity.

Data Collection Procedures - Individual Contact and Interview

Initial contact by letter was made to a targeted pool of interviewees, selected according to the sampling plan and representing approximately double the amount of targeted interviews for a site. This initial letter described the project and requested their participation (Appendix H). At most of the sites, interviewees could volunteer for participation by contacting an on-campus office and identifying an appropriate day and time for the interview. Approximately two weeks after initial mailing, the research team verified the number of scheduled interviews. Phone contact was made to the remainder of individuals from the identified institutional sampling pool of potential interviewees to determine their interest in participation. Contacts were made to individuals in the targeted pool until the maximum number of site interviews were scheduled.

At each telephone contact with a prospective participant, the interview process was reviewed and any questions regarding the study were answered. If the telephone contact affirmed involvement in the interview, a meeting date and time was scheduled at the local institution. After initial completion of the schedule for interviews at each site, there were occasions for further identification and inclusion of interviewees. If committed participants were unable to meet the interview date and a suitable alternative time could not be identified, a replacement interviewee was selected from the remaining pool members and contacted. At two of the sites, researchers received additional referrals by the interviewed adult undergraduates identifying interested friends or relatives at the institution who also desired to be interviewed. These referrals were acknowledged, but not acted upon by the researchers.

Each interview was held at an identified location at the institutional site of the participant. Most of the interviews were held in either conference rooms, classrooms, private meeting rooms, or offices. Meeting times ranged from 8:00 a.m. to as late as 10:00 p.m. Although weekend dates were provided, no participants chose the weekend option. The interview process started at the Allerton College site in March 1992 and ended at Fremont University in mid-February 1993. All interviews at a site were conducted before establishing the next round of interviews at the next case site. Each participant interview included the following initial background activities: introduction of the study; discussion of use of data and the study's safeguards regarding anonymity and confidentiality; interviewee and interviewer signatures on permission form (Appendix I); researcher query regarding any preliminary interviewee questions or concerns; and the interviewee completion of a demographic sheet (Appendix G). After these initial activities, the audio-taped interview was conducted, lasting approximately 1 to 2 hours. At most interviews, two tape recorders were used; the second simultaneous tape recording was done to provide a backup for any technical problems. Because of potential influence of an interviewer in the data collection process, the two researchers each conducted approximately half of the interviews at most of the sites.

Research Analysis

Analysis of data was grounded in inductive thematizing and categorizing of narrative data, both within each case, across cases at each site, and across categories of institutions. Each case study interview provided both descriptive and analytic categories of adult student actions, beliefs, experiences, and judgements. Analysis of narrative data was conducted in segments guided by the broad domains of the interview topics. Initially each adult interview was analyzed. This was followed by a cross-case analysis within each institutional site. This mid-level analysis produced an abbreviated institutional case study for each site (note Appendices A-F). A cross-case analysis was conducted by institutional category for the six institutional sites. Finally, global categories and themes were derived by an analysis across all interviews and institutional sites.

Because of the significant size of the study database, the researchers established an *a priori* set of analytic codes linked to the broad domains covered in each interview. Initial codes were modified based upon an inductive analysis and examination of the themes and categories from approximately seven transcripts at the first site. Additional modifications of the codes occurred throughout the study as new and unique themes appeared. Following the initial coding of each interview, cross-case code files within each site were created on disk. Each code file contained both descriptive and analytic data related to particular aspects of the adult undergraduate's interview. For example, one of the code files, FAMS.xxx, included all statements and comments about the interviewee's spouse; another code file, PROF.xxx, represented all statements and comments about professors. Within each code file, each segment of the transcript was placed in the file with its transcript number and page number(s) from the printed transcript to enhance data tracking and retrieval. Each code file was further identified by institutional site, using a filename extension. For example, FAMS.ALL contained all statements about spouses made by all participants at the Allerton College site. In addition, the researchers created theoretical memos throughout the study; these memos related to emergent key themes, noted insights regarding relationships between perceptions and circumstances of the adult learners and served as reminders to seek thematic and categorical verification between past and future steps in the analysis.

Due to both the size of the database and in order to enhance credibility, the inductive analysis within sites was conducted based on a splitting of the site files into two large domains: a) Self, Life Roles and Actions; and b) Institutional and

Classroom/Learning Characteristics and Actions. Each of the researchers then conducted inductive analysis of one of the designated domains and maintained that focus across sites and throughout the study. A statement of key themes and categories related to each of the two broad domains was developed by each researcher. These two domain inductive analyses were then discussed and compared by the researchers. Based upon uniqueness of each of the domains as well as commonalities across the domains, themes and categories were then merged and written up in an abbreviated ten-page case study for each site. Issues of interpretation were verified by reviewing the transcripts and initial code files.

Member checking was brought into play at this point in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The written case study for each site was sent to the appropriate institutional contact person for review. The institutional representative was asked to review the site case study draft for accuracy. The representative was free to seek special feedback from key individual(s) within the institution, but was asked not to publicly distribute this preliminary draft. Telephone conversations with the institutional representative, as well as facsimile and mail comments verified accuracy and representativeness of the initial site case study findings. The draft of the case was also sent to each interviewee for feedback on the accuracy and representative presentation of the case in relation to their personal experiences with the institution. Feedback from the individual interviewees was sought through a) a request letter, b) a draft of the site case study, c) a feedback form that included open-ended response options along with Likert-type items and d) a self-addressed, stamped return envelope (Appendix J). At the first site, a completely open-ended sheet requesting feedback was sent, with limited results. Therefore, the Likert-type scale was developed to provide more helpful feedback to the research team. This feedback sheet provided a validation mechanism through interviewee comments and was an innovative approach to verifying inductive themes and findings. Feedback from the interviewees typically represented a 20% to 25% response rate. Approximately 94% of these respondents were very supportive of the report and noted its congruence with their experiences and beliefs. A few reported that a section of the site case study differed from their particular personal beliefs or experiences. Only one respondent indicated two sections which differed. A few offered additional suggestions for ways their institution could respond more effectively to adult students.

As an additional means of increasing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), some of the case studies and selected portions of the transcripts were shared. These discussions occurred at about mid-way in the study and included both doctoral and faculty research groups knowledgeable about research and particularly qualitative approaches to research. These discussions were conducted to examine the inductive qualitative approach and current findings of the study, to critique and discuss the analysis and the site case study reports, and to evaluate the format and presentation of the site cases. These discussions were conducted while maintaining the anonymity of the interviewees and the sites. In addition, special attention was given one of the site cases after an institutional representative raised a question of possible bias in regard to one of the identified themes. Several faculty and doctoral students were consulted regarding the analysis and presentation of this case.

Throughout this mid-level analysis, it became apparent that each site generated new conceptual categories and attributes, as well as exposing greater depth of existing categories. Although each case often had similar broad categories, each institutional case presented unique descriptive perceptions, beliefs, values, and actions. Thus, there was a constant comparative analysis of properties, relationships, conditions, and processes.

With the completion of the six institutional cases, a second round analysis was done according to type of academic setting (public community college, adult degree program in private liberal arts college or public university). Themes within a particular postsecondary setting were generated. It was discovered that the two adult degree programs in the private liberal arts colleges were significantly different from each other, generating few common themes. Therefore these two programs were treated separately during subsequent phases of the analysis. The last stage of the analysis involved a comparative analysis of the individual cases across and within all six sites focused upon the three major themes of Adult as Person, Adult as Student Learner, and Adult Images of Involvement as Student. This final stage of the study delineated a set of key categories and themes representing adult undergraduates across all settings. Subsequent chapters in this report present the key themes and categories organized according to the key research questions of the study, with the last chapter presenting the major findings and implications of the study.

Chapter 2

Adult Beliefs of Student Entry and Socialization

INTRODUCTION

Adult student beliefs about the college student role and about their own abilities to act successfully in that role are at the heart of adult undergraduate education. These beliefs deeply influence their perceptions of the college environment and their engagement in classroom learning experiences. These beliefs influence how they participate in college and how they relate to faculty and students. Foremost, these beliefs have a significant influence on how they judge themselves and their actions of learning in the collegiate environment. This chapter will provide a backdrop of prior literature and research regarding adult student perceptions of college entry and the student role, early research concerning adult intellectual abilities to succeed in the college environment, as well as research which guided the framing of this current study. In this chapter, key perceptual meaning framework by adult students regarding the student entry process, influences on socialization to the student role, and adult student beliefs which influenced their actions in the student role will be presented.

Past Literature and Research

Describing and understanding the learning actions of adult undergraduate students has been small but steady focus in the research of adult education, and to a lesser extent in the research of higher education. Early research about the adult undergraduate experience began with recorded observations and studies of the teaching-learning interactions of working adult students in undergraduate evening classes and evening colleges in the 1930's and 40's, as well as studies focused upon abilities and participation of World War II veterans enrolled in college (Dyer, 1956; Carey, 1961; DeCrow, 1959; Frederiksen & Schrader, 1951). Early concerns were voiced about cognitive differences which come with aging and their potential negative impact upon undergraduate studies. There have also been many research studies examining the comparable academic performance between adult and younger students (Kasworm, 1980; Kasworm, 1990a; Kasworm & Pike, in press). In the 1960's, early theorizing by Knowles (1980) focused upon andragogy (the art and science of facilitating adult learning) and the belief that more autonomous, self-directed adult learning activities should be created in the college learning environment. Current research on adult learning continued these previous interests in adult student abilities, with examinations of cognitive strategies, psychosocial dimensions, as well as the varied teaching-learning strategies and classroom environment (Cross, 1981; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). In addition, more recent work has also focused on the modeling of adult participation patterns and explication of learning goals in higher education (Cross, 1981; Kasworm, 1993b; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Slotnick et al., 1993), as well as the impact of specialized adult degree programs, adult oriented curricula, and adult sensitive instructional strategies (Apps, 1981, 1989; Hall, 1991).

Most current perspectives reveal a strong practitioner belief system that values supportive entry, academic success, and more individualized attention to the needs and experiences of adult undergraduate learners. These common perspectives portray adult undergraduate learners as more motivated; desiring greater autonomy in their learning, more self-directing, more practical/utilitarian in their learning interests, desiring to focus on immediate application of information, and disliking grading systems as well as unfair grading practices (Apps, 1981; Knowles, 1980; Slotnick, et al.,1993). Other practitioner discussions concerning reentry women and adult community college students suggest that many adults enter higher education with high levels of personal anxiety, with fear of experiencing derision and intimidation, and beliefs of possible failure and being identified as stupid or intellectually inept within the academically competitive environment. In addition, other studies have attempted to characterize the dispositional, situational, and institutional barriers faced by adult learners. Greatest concern has focused upon institutional and situational barriers, which include: access; time conflicts; work demands; family role conflicts; limited resources; as well as related institutional issues affecting the design of specific delivery systems, instructional formats, and programs targeted to adult learners (Apps, 1988; Cross, Valley & Associates, 1976; Hesburgh, Miller, & Wharton, 1973; Peterson & Associates, 1979). However, as important as these perspectives and limited research have been, most studies in higher education have examined in situ adult groups with marginal generalizability to other settings, ignoring the cultural differences among adult students and between collegiate settings. These studies have predominantly investigated adult participation in traditional four-year public university settings, while enrollment patterns of adult students would suggest that adult undergraduates are represented in large numbers in a public four-year college, private college/university, as well as community college. There is a significant need to understand and describe the adult learner engagement in the undergraduate learning experience from a variety of collegiate settings.

Focus of Current Study and Related Literature

This chapter is focused upon the second guiding question of the study: **How do adults describe their learning engagement in the classroom and its relationship to their broader life involvements?** These academic learning engagements are believed to be reflected primarily in adult students' beliefs and actions within the collegiate classroom structure and process. However, they also occur within the day-to-day life-world of adult pursuits of work, family, and community roles. Thus, the study specifically focused on adult student-defined elements of thinking, learning, and actions within both the academic context and multiple adult-defined life contexts.

It was assumed that academic learning engagements reflected both the designs of the academic environment, as well as the lived experiences which were socially constructed by the learner. As suggested by Bruner (1986),

> Most of our encounters with the world are not direct encounters. Even our direct experiences, so called, are assigned for interpretation to ideas about cause and consequence, and the world that emerges for us is a conceptual world. When we are puzzled about what we encounter, we renegotiate its meaning. (p.122)

Thus, learning engagements were "socially negotiated" experiences in the life-world of the adult student.

Unlike past research which draws upon pedagogical and teaching/learning theory to describe key elements of teaching and learning, this study asked each learner to talk about their perceptions, beliefs, and actions in the classroom and in actions of learning through their varied life roles. Each learner provided a unique perspective of his/her learning experiences, of particularly vivid and powerful learning events, and of their beliefs about their lived experiences as learner and as adult student in our society. These reported beliefs and actions represented negotiated meanings by the students as they created their conceptual worlds of student, learner, classroom, collegiate institution, and current adult life roles.

In understanding these negotiated meanings, the study also drew upon past research on the epistemology of knowledge, intellectual development, and self-meaning constructions fostered through the work of Bruner (1986), Perry (Chickering & Associates, 1981; Perry, 1970), Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1985), Baxter-Magolda (1992), and others. These perspectives presented the social constructivist framework and suggested the implicit relationship between intellectual development and specific kinds of cognitive and affective experiences that challenge personal meanings of self and world.

This current study differs from dominant perspectives of research on learning in higher education settings. Prior research often assumes that students incorporate and act within the traditional beliefs of higher education. These beliefs focus on a highly structured and stylized process of transmission of knowledge and values from those who are designated as content experts (faculty), with the passive acceptance of knowledge to learners (students) who are not expert and knowledgeable. Quality higher education presents the need for a traditional expert (faculty) to aid the novice (student) with one-way transmission of authoritative truths and with regular expert assessment through tests, papers, and grading systems. Thus, students are assumed to enter the classroom without prior exposure to knowledge and skill and to gain competence under the direct tutelage of the faculty. There have been a number of recent critiques of this philosophy in higher education. Probably the most salient voices have been Freire's (1970) theories of banking education; Bruner's theories (1986) of pedagogy, teaching and learning; and Belenky, Goldberger, Clinchy, and Tarule's discussion of *Women's Ways of*

Knowing (1986). These individuals have suggested that the learner is *not* empty, unknowing, and naive, lacking both expert knowledge and worldly experiences. Rather, adults have entered the classroom learning environment with a broad array of background experiences and current life responsibilities, while desiring to learn new, specialized knowledge and skill from the academic context. These ideas have been supported by recent work in expert and novice knowledge. For example, the work of Sternberg and Wagner (1986), as well as Scribner (1986), has examined the nature of practical intelligence, with Ceci and Liker (1986) specifically examining academic and nonacademic intelligence. There is a growing body of literature to suggest that learners bring expert as well as novice background to a learning engagement. In addition to studies on expert and novice knowledge, recent research on everyday and situated cognition and learning has informed this perspective (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff & Lave, 1984). This research and theory suggests the importance of the learner's role in the learning process and of the understanding of meaning and application of learning across the adult life context beyond the collegiate classroom.

Based in the activity theory of Vygotsky, life-world role activities of the adult are considered as the units of analysis. In this theoretical foundation, life activities are assumed to be influenced as adults choose actions based on constructed personal meaning. The life-world context of the adult student was assumed to influence these students' learning engagement in undergraduate education (Kasworm, 1990b). Activity theory suggested that adult student learning is a reflection of the entire learner social system; "adult students are examples of centrifugal growth, of academic growth towards outward roles and experiences" (Kasworm, 1990, p. 366). Thus, this study examined the adult student's perspectives of his or her multiple activity roles of worker, family member, community member, and adult learner as they interacted and influenced the student role and the construction of internal cognitive meanings. It was believed that adult learners made meaning of the undergraduate experience as they engaged in these roles.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER

Because of the complexity, richness, and diversity of perspectives and insights of beliefs and actions in learning, this and the following chapter will present key themes and findings regarding the adult engagement in learning within the classroom transaction and with other actions related to the student learner role. In understanding key adult beliefs and actions in the undergraduate experience, it was evident that there were several spheres of private and public constructed meaning. This chapter will focus on the entry and socialization beliefs of adult undergraduates and their key beliefs concerning the adult student role. Chapter Four will present the perceived elements of the classroom transaction and adult undergraduate actions and beliefs about learning in relation to current life roles.

Background Information on Learner Designations and Academic Contexts

Because the study purposefully interviewed adult undergraduates from a variety of life contexts, from varied places in their academic progression towards a degree, and from six institutional settings, differences in beliefs and actions among the adult students were evident. To aid the reader in understanding the differences within these discussions, academic terms for groups of learners and a brief synopsis of key characteristics of the research site academic settings are noted below:

Key terms used to designate specific subsets of adult undergraduates, include:

- **new entry adult students**—adults students with no prior higher education enrollment.
- **reentry adult students**—adults who have experienced prior enrollment either as a young adult or more recently as an adult and had a previous drop-out or stop-out experience(s) in higher education.
- **lower-division students**—students who were currently enrolled in their freshman or sophomore years of study
- **upper-division students**—students who were currently enrolled in junior or senior years of study in a designated academic major.

Six institutional sites with differing programmatic and demographic features in this study included:

Adult-Degree Programs in Private Liberal Arts College Settings

Allerton College

This private liberal arts college had a customized adult degree program at a number of regional extension sites. Adult student interviewees were in an upper-division, adult degree major in applied organizational management located at an extension site with an enrollment of 275 adult students. The program featured an accelerated curriculum (upper-level degree work done in a 15-month, lock-step sequence of one-course units in five- to six-week blocks). Students entered in groups of 12-15 per cohort. Each cohort experienced all course work together directed by practitioner instructors. Each course had a weekly format of a one-night class experience of four hours and a required small study group meeting of three to five students for another four-hour evening, totalling eight hours per week of meeting time. The program also featured portfolio assessment of academically equivalent life experiences and a senior research project. [Note Appendix A—Case Study of Allerton College.]

Charles College

This private liberal arts college of 1620 enrollment offered an administratively distinct on-campus adult degree college. The Adult Alternative College had 520 adults enrolled in adult degree undergraduate studies.

Upper-division adult degree majors in business, accounting, and computer information systems were interviewed. These students experienced both a liberal arts undergraduate core and a professional major of upper-level work. Courses were offered in a semester format either in the evenings or on the weekends. [Note Appendix C—Case Study of Charles College.]

Community College College-Transfer Program Settings

Bayville Community College

This public community college of 7,800 students had a predominant enrollment in technical degree areas. Adults students in varied lower-division degree concentrations of the college's transfer program were interviewed. All interviewees had completed 15 hours of credit course work, as well as any developmental studies requirements. [Note Appendix B—Case Study of Bayville Community College.]

Elmwood Community College

This public community college, with a predominant technical degree focus and a student enrollment of 30,000, was located in a major city center. Adults in the college transfer program in varied lower-division degree concentrations were interviewed. These adults had completed at least 15 hours of credit course work, as well as any developmental studies requirements. [Note Appendix E—Case Study of Elmwood Community College.]

Public University Settings

Delta University

A public university as of 1965, it offered undergraduate and master's programs with limited doctoral study and had a total enrollment of 15,400. The university has a limited history of targeting services to adult students, but currently has an adult support services in the Office for Reentry and Nontraditional students. Seven curricula are offered in the evening hours. A mix of lower- and upper-division adult students representing nine academic majors were interviewed. [Note Appendix D—Case Study of Delta University.]

Fremont University

As a public land-grant university, it had a current enrollment of 25,000. It offered a comprehensive mission with over 300 degree programs and master's, professional, and doctoral programs. The university has a long history of serving adult undergraduate students through evening school and correspondence instruction. The institutional unit of the Evening School, in concert with academic units, offers basic lower-division courses, electives for most four-year degree programs, and bachelor degrees in 15 majors which can be completed in the evening. The University has recently developed an Office for Reentry and Nontraditional Students. A mix of lower- and upper-division adult students representing 12 majors were interviewed. [Note Appendix F—Case Study of Fremont University.]

Organization of the Research Findings

In this study, broad generalized actions and beliefs across most collegiate environments and adult student groups are presented in *categories*. These categories of meaning present global meaning descriptions by most adults in the six institutional collegiate settings. It was evident that both the adult past experiences with collegiate enrollment and the specific collegiate setting were related to specific key perspectives, beliefs, and reported actions. These more specific meanings reflect *themes* characterized by a particular grouping of adults who represented similar background experiences of student role or of similar collegiate environments. In this study, five different adult student status and institutional contexts were identified with differing themes within a category of key meaning. Because of the diversity of adult life experiences, complexity of current life circumstances of these adults, and the complexity of the six institutions, this report will also present *subthemes* which suggested particularistic beliefs and perspectives. At this more focused level, these subthemes illuminate specialized perspectives and actions within themes. These subthemes were distinguished by the belief or action of a smaller collection of adult students who acted in several differing ways within the meaning structure. These subthemes are reported in italics within this chapter. In the final Summary section of this chapter is a chart that outlines these categories and themes for the five groupings of students and related collegiate settings.

THE ENTRY PROCESS INTO THE STUDENT LEARNER ROLE

Adults entered or reentered the student learner role with specific beliefs that influenced their actions in the collegiate setting. Each adult student had expectations and fears concerning involvement in an academic learning environment in higher education. These adults also experienced varied collegiate environments that created additional perceptual meanings and interactions as a support or as a hindrance to their student involvement. Thus, adults acted from both private belief spheres of self-knowledge and from public spheres of socialized constructed beliefs about student, collegiate setting, and societal judgements.

The student entry process was often one of the most jarring and emotional initial concerns for adult undergraduates. This section will present this process through discussion of five broad themes and a diversity of subthemes. For those who entered college for the first time, there was diversity of beliefs and actions because adult undergraduates came from varied past educational experiences of high school, GED, technical college, and/or other forms of work training. For adults who reentered the collegiate environment, their beliefs and actions were often more complex in comparison to first-time entry students. This complexity was based upon additional beliefs and experiences from previous collegiate institutions, their own past history as students, and their past and current goals as adults in a student role. Adults spoke with vivid memories and emotions about their entry beliefs and actions in taking on and adding the student role to their other life roles. All of these adults believed that they were entering a special cultural environment which had different expectations, desired behaviors, and judging systems. They entered and expected to become "undergraduate students," yet they each viewed this role and entry process from different, particularistic beliefs and perspectives. Adult undergraduate students desired to understand and meet external judgements for appropriate and successful classroom performance. Most of these adults noted dominating concern for meeting academic grade requirements. However, in more thoughtful moments, many also noted their concern for meeting the collegiate expectations for other observed classroom student behaviors beyond grade expectations. In addition, some adults also viewed the student role as a stylized learner role that allowed for sophisticated growth in lifelong learning pursuits and in "becoming an educated thinker." Adapting to a student role for these adult students was a matter of both academic behaviors and attitudes, as well as self-confidence and identity as a student. This adaptation was often prominent to new entry students who could not draw upon analogous experience which predicted their future success. Reentry students or transfer students often spoke to knowledge of their prior academic success as a gauge for future success. However, this knowledge was not always comforting. Some adults were worried about initial academic difficulties because they were in a new, more competitive collegiate environment with potentially different expectations and procedures, or because they desired to improve upon their past academic performance.

Significant concern for future success in college were voiced by four distinct subgroupings of students. These groupings included: 1) new entry adults who as young adults had been average high school students, 2) new entry adults who had dropped out of high school and achieved a GED (assessment test for equivalent high school diploma knowledge), 3) new reentry adults who had done marginal collegiate work and dropped or stopped out, and 4) new reentry adults who had failed prior college work as young adult students and reentered after a significant break in time to try again. These individuals suggested five key alternative perspectives of perceiving and acting upon their initial entry.

Becoming a Member of the Academic Community

Many of these students who were concerned about future success in college were in the "proving game." For one group of these students, they viewed *the first few semesters as the place to prove to the institution, to themselves, to friends and family, and sometimes to the larger community that they could be successful as college students.* This perspective was a broad belief of both tangible actions and intuitive knowing by these adults. These adults reported the dominant role of broad external indicators of grades and faculty feedback to determine success or improvement, of informal collegiate relationships and conversations to define this success and self-confidence, and sometimes of personal support systems to provide positive praise for their efforts and struggles. These individuals focused on deliberately following and doing all the required and perceived valued actions towards becoming successful in the class. In addition, they valued tangible, positive feedback and assistance to determine their success. After a few semesters of serious effort to become and act as college students, most of these adults reported that they knew they were capable of succeeding in college.

A second group of new entry and new reentry adult students also were in the proving game but they focused on *a scheme of incremental steps, with each step offering both risk-taking and hopeful success in their college participation.* They spoke to the development of this planning strategy for success as a more comforting and reasonable approach. This subgroup, predominantly within the community college setting, talked about not knowing what to expect and not having control over their environment and lives. These individuals focused on small, manageable goals which were executed in short-term commitments with focused expectations and actions. For some adults, the focus was on a test; for some it was a developmental studies course completion; for some it was an academic course in a more personally challenging discipline area (often English or math); and for some it was the first semester of study. If they were successful in this first step of action and involvement, they would continue to the next small goal in this long journey. At the completion of each step, they reappraised their abilities and possibilities before committing to the next goal and action step. These adults believed that the adult journey in a college degree program was too long, unknown, and potentially filled with failure traps. They needed and wanted a more controlled target, with success markers and positive success reinforcement along the way. As discussed by one student,

> What I do as a senior [older] student is set meaningful short-term goals that are within my physical and mental capability of finishing...Keep it flexible—just do it in short increments—and you keep it kind of under control by doing that way. It doesn't seem like such a burden. It's more achievable. You're more likely to come up with success than you are failure.

This concern for handling the long, unknown process of college degree work was further suggested by an Elmwood student: "Learning patience, you've got to do it a step at a time, and it will be all right at the end. And that's something to apply to life...not look for easy answers. But you find that in a classroom, because you kind of have to go step by step until you learn." Thus, this strategy of small, incremental steps created a more reasonable approach to handling the fears and anxieties facing them as they began their student role, as well as handling the demands of academic work in a judging environment.

Taking on the student role for the first time or assuming a different student role through transfer to another institution was both exciting and intimidating. These adults were figuring out how to act as students and how to be successful in an environment that had a strongly delineated judgement of student academic success. These students often expressed *fears and anxieties about fitting into the particular collegiate environment* and being able to succeed as student learners. Some questioned their abilities: "Can I do it? You have to prove to yourself that you can." Another student from Delta University noted, "I guess my worst fear is to find out I'm stupid. You know, to go back and find out that you can't do it, I think that's the worst fear." These individuals searched out environmental messages to determine appropriate actions and behaviors, as well as external judgements of their success in adapting.

The first month of teacher interactions and judgements of their performance had a profound impact on three particular subgroupings of adult students: 1) the new entry students, 2) reentry students with a significant break in enrollment, and 3) some adult transfer students. These three groupings of adults placed significant emphasis on faculty feedback from their initial tests and papers. They also reported closely observing and interpreting fellow student interactions and judgements, and making comparative judgement about other students' abilities in the classroom in relation to their own abilities during these first few months in the college classroom. These subgroupings of adult students often reported that they initially defined their own abilities and personal worth based upon these observations and feedback. They attempted to assess their level of abilities and competence within a view of the academic classroom as a competitive setting.

These *adults quickly discovered that they could succeed and be respected by faculty and fellow students.* They discovered they were not stupid. They often found that they were just uninformed about particular sets of procedures and actions in a highly specialized environment. Many found that their background was not a major hindrance to their performance in the classroom; they could do well and succeed. After the first few months of successful classroom involvement, most students continued to internally monitor other students in their classes and make comparative judgements. However, because they knew they were similar in capabilities to the younger and their fellow adult students, these adults reported engaging in reflections and judgements about themselves in their own development of desired future learner skills, apart from feedback from others. (As will be noted later, there was a subset of new entry adults who found that they could not perform at the top level of the class due to rusty skills and knowledge or to inadequate background. These students delayed their beliefs of perceived success in the classroom for a much longer period of time.)

Adapting to a Different Academic Culture

Unlike new entry adults and some new reentry adult students, most continuing reentry adult students were less sensitive to external major signs of grades. However, when they entered into a new academic environment, they reported *observing and judging others who were already part of this culture for signs of acceptance and support.* Just as new entrant adults determined their acceptance and success through the contextual environment of faculty and classmates, these re-entrant adults also engaged in this process of environmental scanning. However, unlike the new entry or reentry adults with a significant lapse in prior enrollment who felt they needed to prove that they could succeed, these reentry student groupings already believed they would likely succeed. They were more concerned about adapting quickly and effectively to the collegiate environment. For them, key information about successful adaptation came from faculty, other "seasoned" adult students, and sometimes co-workers who had been adult college students. Reentry adults looked to these individuals to provide initial support through positive and supportive interactions, as well as to offer a successful role model of student life.

These reentry adults did not speak to general fears about entering the current college scene. More often they noted a more *judging posture of the current institution, in relation to the previous institution.* They determined how they would fare as students drawing upon the previous academic environment and their experiences, in relation to judging the similar and dissimilar qualities of the new environment. They also made comparative judgements about the valued and less valued features and student experiences between their past and current institutions.

There was yet a different perspective from adult students who entered the adult degree programs in private liberal arts colleges. These adults were aware that they were entering an adult environment. They *valued their place within an adult-oriented program* and their association with a special group of adults who were also seeking the same goals of a college credential and a college education. Some of these adults raised issues and concerns about adapting again to a different collegiate environment and of being successful as they balanced the student role with their work and family roles. However, most felt more assured of success because they were in an adult-oriented program.

Beyond general concerns for reentry and adaptation to the student role, adult students in the Allerton adult degree program reported *specific fears based upon the accelerated curriculum and customized program format.* The design of Allerton's adult degree program was an attraction, but it was also an unknown experience. Some adult students entering the Allerton program seriously questioned their commitment and ability to do the academic work in an accelerated format. They believed that the adult degree structure of the Allerton program provided academic and psychological support for them. However, both because of the demanding nature of an accelerated program and their past experiences with other collegiate programs, many of these adult students initially were anxious and questioned their abilities and resources. Some students reported that the first two courses in the sequence of the program were too demanding and caused them to question their ability to continue. "The first class I took at Allerton, I didn't think I was going to survive it. We had a lot of work to do. I was just not used to having to push that hard." Other students reported that the first two classes were very helpful in student entry. "The first two classes we had, there were a lot of people unsure about if they were going to succeed or thought about dropping out. However, there was a lot of support there for them." These first two courses, which included an orientation to the program, student academic skills (with a particular emphasis on writing), and an overview of portfolio development, were viewed as important early experiences. By the time the students had completed the final course on development of portfolio validation for life experiences (two courses later), most interviewees believed that adult students either stayed in the program for the duration or dropped out. These early courses, including the portfolio development, appeared to be a watershed for the program. Charles College, on the other hand, had students who reflected concerns for adaptation into a new collegiate environment in relation to the above subgroupings, but did not voice the unique concerns and experiences of the Allerton group.

Student Role Impacting Self-Knowledge

The majority of adult students in this study noted the development of a congruence between self and student role in this adaptation process. They saw themselves incorporating the student role into their lives, with full-time students noting more focus on the student role on the campus, and part-time students noting the press of difficulties in balancing student role with other life roles. In addition, a subgrouping of first-time entry students suggested that entry success was not only adaptation and congruence with the student role, it was also an unexpected changing of self, resulting from the student role. These students often reported a dramatic personal change in their internal view and beliefs about themselves. For example, one student noted that after two years at Bayville Community College, "Well, I see myself differently now, than I did two years ago or even a year ago. Not so much that they have changed [other people in her life], as I have. I've grown from the inside and know who I am and what it is that I want." These beliefs about the impact of college on self often focused on the development of self-confidence and the enhancement of self-identity and life purpose.

Avoidance of Collegiate Socialization

There were also some adults who noted a lack of interest and desire in being socialized into the student role. These few individuals just wanted the credential, judging college life from this utilitarian perspective. They wished to maintain their primary socialization in work, self, and, if appropriate, family. Often these individuals, as students, were involved in learning in limited ways. They saw themselves as wanting to remain detached; they did not wish to immerse themselves in the role and in the belief system of student learner. One student from Fremont University who observed these avoiders of student role socialization commented, "This type of student is just there hoping that while they're in class something will rub off on them long enough to make it on a test." These students usually expressed the necessity for having a college credential but did not believe in the value and worth of a college education. One Allerton student reported, "As I move into management, I find that many companies are just unwilling to consider someone without a degree for upper slots. And that may be arbitrary but that's the way it is, so the bottom line is I need a piece of paper...I want that degree, so that I can make more money." This subset of students viewed their involvement as a societal or business force that propelled them into the college classroom to maintain their current position, to be promoted into a higher position, or to gain a comparable position in another company. They viewed society as creating this business requirement for the college credential, but they believed that the requirement was a mockery of solid work experiences and a fraudulent substitute for appropriate learning experiences. They viewed themselves as knowledgeable and competent for the position and believed a college credential was only a piece of paper for screening, rather than a demonstration of knowledge and worth applicable to the work world.

Institutional Supports for Student Role Entry

Most of the adult undergraduates, both new entry and reentry students, were aware that college student roles are customarily viewed as "young adult student roles" and included full-time involvement and minimal life role responsibilities. Many of these entry or reentry adults who returned after a young adult collegiate involvement expressed self doubts about being "like a college student." Unless these adult students had friends who had recently been adult college students, they often had no model for being a different kind of college student. Such adults were creating a new path from many unknowns within a collegiate setting, as well as drawing upon their own abilities to adapt and perform. It was clear that institutional supports such as an adult support service or the presence of adult students in a class aided in their adaptation.

Institutional supports were part of the initial entry or reentry process for many students. At the two community colleges, participants spoke to the key support of the faculty and staff who interacted with individual students. In addition, at Bayville Community College, the new entry adult student group spoke to the value of developmental studies in promoting successful entry, while the comparable group at Elmwood Community College did not focus on developmental studies as unique and significance experiences in the transition. At the two public universities, most students viewed as key institutional support faculty in the classroom, and select staff who aided them in their admissions process or advisement process. In addition, a few students mentioned the support of the Office for Nontraditional Students. At Delta University, a number of students spoke to special interventions by administrative staff to aid entry and gain access to specific programs. Adult students who participated in evening courses at Fremont University also spoke of the evening school, its format, and initial advising. At the two adult degree programs in private liberal arts colleges, students spoke to the predominant framework of the program as a key support. In addition, they reported the value of initial advisement and the access to supportive staff. Allerton adult students spoke to the supportive elements of the program design, the study group, and general extension site personnel. At Charles College, the Adult Alternative College staff and faculty support were believed to be important adult student supports.

Although institutional support services were believed to be of aid in this socialization process, most of the interviewed adult students identified their relationships with their classroom teachers as the primary supportive relationship for self as student learner. These adults believed that this key faculty support related to their success; therefore, they valued a belief in connectedness with the faculty instructor in the classroom as they gained confidence in their student role. Positive classroom interaction and support was intertwined with their perceptions of success as students.

None of these 90 students believed they gained primary academic support for initial student success from the broader collegiate climate of student services, extra curricular or co-curricular activities. They did report that initial entry was often linked to specific helpful access systems or developmental studies; however, they usually noted the more dominant value of collegiate staff or faculty who intervened to aid them in solving problems. When asked about the presence or absence of institutional support services for adult students, they did want services to be made available. *They judged the general support of the college or university towards adult students by the presence of these services.* These students believed special adult-oriented academic programs and scheduling, as well as adult-sensitive faculty and staff attitudes, communicated to these students that they were accepted and valued members of the academic community. However, most of these adult students saw themselves as being highly self-sufficient and usually not in need of specialized services. They believed that these services should be made available to less fortunate adults who came with greater needs and who required special institutional assistance to be successful.

Summary of Entry Process

There were five broad key themes in the entry process of taking on the student role. The first theme, **becoming a member of the academic community** was suggested by entry or reentry adults who viewed entry as a dramatic change. Subthemes within this desire to become socialized into the academic community, included: 1) proving to themselves and sometimes friends and family that they could be successful as college students; 2) developing a scheme of incremental stages to risk-taking and succeeding in their college participation; 3) expressing fears and anxieties about fitting into the particular collegiate environment; and 4) discovering that they could succeed and be respected by faculty and fellow students. The second broad theme of **adapting to a different academic culture** was expressed by reentry adults who viewed this action as a transition from one environment to another. Key subthemes included: 1) observing and judging others who were already part of this culture for signs of acceptance and support; 2) identifying a judging posture towards the current institution, in relation to the previous institution; and 3) expressing specific fears based upon the accelerated curriculum and customized program format especially within the Allerton College subgroup. The third theme suggested an **impact of the student role on self-knowledge.** This theme of self-change as a result of the student role most often was expressed by the community college group. The fourth theme suggested a theme of **avoidance of collegiate socialization** by a subgrouping of adult students. This theme was most often expressed by upper-level students viewing their involvement as a requirement for their career security and advancement. The final theme focused upon **institutional resources and supports for student role entry.** Within each environment and grouping of students, there were common beliefs of the value of the faculty as a key resource for entry, with specific environmental differences between institutions as to other institutional resource supports for adults.

SOCIALIZATION IN THE ADULT STUDENT ROLE

There were a significant number of adult undergraduates in this study who had prior collegiate experiences. As they reentered college or transferred from one college to another college, they came into the student role with a knowledge of the requirements and of their past abilities to perform. As they checked out the new cultural context, they often determined a need to alter or refine their expectations or actions. They desired to become socialized into this new collegiate culture. In addition, after making the transition into a collegiate environment, those adults who entered as new students or as students with a significant gap in their previous enrollment also suggested that there were certain activities of adaptation and socialization into the collegiate environment. This section will present three key themes in the socialization process of the adult student role: Stairstepping from prior experiences into current student role, resolving background uneven knowledge and skills, and learning how to learn and study.

Stairstepping from Prior Experiences into Current Student Role

Most adults drew upon their past life experiences in their adaptation and socialization to the student role. Four subthemes were voiced by these adults regarding the relationship of their own past life experiences and accomplishment in relation to their current socialization into the student role. More often reentry adults would speak to these themes, while new entry adults often discounted their past life experiences to aid in socialization in this new cultural context. One group of reentry adults expressed a subtheme focused on *personal confidence and a belief in self for their continued success.* These adults judged themselves as successful individuals. They did not speak to their uniqueness in relation to entry or continuance with college. They knew that they would continue to be successful and could adapt to the student role and the collegiate culture. This group believed in themselves and their own abilities to be successful in a variety of contexts.

A second group of adults noted a subtheme of future student success based on the *assumption that their expertise in other life roles would carry through in this student role.* Representing a group of adult students who had successful business careers or success in high profile volunteer activities, they viewed the student role as requiring similar abilities and commitments as their current and past major performance roles. Not all reentry students with successful business or volunteer careers necessarily equated their prior life role success with automatic success in the student role. Some students with these backgrounds judged the adaptation to the student role as dramatically different and requiring different skills and abilities. The adults in this second group were unlike the first group in that they viewed their past role accomplishment to support their ability to socialize into the student role, as opposed to a belief in self to create success in the student role.

Reentry transfer students who drew upon past successful experiences as enrolled students in another institution were the third group of students who stairstepped from prior experiences. These transfer students usually believed that *because of their recent involvement and success at another institution, they would also be successful in this new setting.* Part of this perspective was based in the belief that they could figure out the institution and its similarities and differences because of these past collegiate experiences. They could easily determine if there were different expectations, so that they could act appropriately and be successful. Often, these students were involved in making comparative judgements of the quality, academic learning focus, and institutional supports for students between the two institutions. These students often reported key strengths and weaknesses in the structure, organization, and resources of the institution for adult students. Thus, multiple experiences in different collegiate institutions provided adult undergraduates with a more informed and critical judgement set about the nature of a college experience for adult undergraduates like themselves.

A dominant fourth group viewed the *student role as a "work ethic" role.* These individuals, who usually represented community college settings, equated student success with perseverance and diligence, staying on task, putting in the time, and foregoing other life activities to complete the task. These beliefs reflected stairstepping on prior experiences, beliefs, and an individual orientation to work and family life. They viewed success in a student role as analogous to success as a committed and dedicated worker. Within this belief or the work ethic student role, this group suggested that their lives required different priorities when they became students. New priorities of college meant sacrificing in relation to competing activities and life responsibilities. "Good students are people who are willing to give up extra things, the pleasures in life, in order to better educate themselves [Bayville]." These students believed that the student commitment required self-discipline, motivation, and a strong belief in the long-term value of an education. Viewing the student role as a commitment to hard work was linked to their determination to overcome potential difficulties or setbacks in their course work or tests. An Elmwood Community College student noted, "Most of the older students are really working hard to get their education and they will do their work; they try their best." There were a number of related beliefs and strategies as part of this perspective. First, there was a belief that adult students should always try to do their best and should seek out assistance if they were having difficulties. Difficulties included such things as doing homework; readings which were judged to be difficult, confusing, or incomprehensible; or demanding papers and tests. Most of these students assumed there were expected and appropriate student actions which would overcome any learning difficulties. The student work ethic role reflected codes of conduct and commitment including: attending all classes and being punctual; taking significant notes; doing all homework and readings promptly; and participating in class. Based on these actions, adults believed that they would have success in quizzes, papers, examinations and in course grades. In addition, they believed that good students were respectful of the teacher and of the classroom environment. This constructed belief of faculty judgements and of grading outcomes also reflected the same belief: that the greater the effort, the higher the grade. Bayville students presented one additional dimension to this subtheme. They also believed that a good student was one who also helped others be successful. Therefore, they assumed that they should also extend a hand to aid others in homework, studying for tests, or exchanging notes, as well as hold these expectations for others to help them when it was needed. In contract, Elmwood students assumed that they could find assistance within the institution when it was needed and did not feel obligated to other students.

Summary of Stairstepping from Prior Experiences as Part of the Socialization Process

Adults who drew upon prior self and life experiences in relation to their entry represented four subthemes related to different subgroupings: 1) one subgrouping noted a sense of personal confidence and belief in self for continued success in the student role; 2) a second subgrouping suggested that the adult students' expertise in other roles would carry through in this student role; 3) the third subgrouping represented students who drew upon their recent involvement and success at another institution as a belief which would reinforce success at this new institution; and 4) a final subgrouping viewed the student role as a "work ethic" role, drawing upon a belief system that expressed their actions in assumed positive course learning and grading outcomes.

Resolving Uneven Knowledge and Skill Background

In all six institutional settings, some adult students recognized either prior to entry or in early entry that they would have academic difficulty because of a background knowledge or skills gap. A portion of these students believed that they had become "rusty" in their academic knowledge and skills because of lack of use of these specialized academic skills in their adult lives, while another portion of these students suspected they were weak in a basic skills area because of past deficient schooling experiences. Another grouping of these adults assumed that they had sufficient skills, but quickly learned in the classroom that they did not come with the level and fluency of knowledge for college classroom activities and related faculty expectations. For many of these individuals, entry was problematic, reflecting either anxiety, fear, anger, or denial of any knowledge or skill difficulties.

Within the community college setting, this particular entry issue was systematically handled by basic skills testing for reading, writing, and mathematics. Most of the new entry community college adults participated in one or more courses of developmental studies. The majority of these adults found this intervention important in gaining needed academic skills. They believed that the institution was trying to be helpful to them, wanting them to succeed. Thus, developmental studies was viewed as an important bridge between *lack of adequate basic skills and the development of reading, writing, and mathematics skills to succeed.* Most of these adults viewed developmental studies as a significant contribution to their future success as undergraduate students. A few adults, on the other hand, saw their placement in developmental studies to be a waste of time. They questioned the review and testing of knowledge and skill in a semester-long course, when a quick review would have been sufficient. A few were embarrassed to be in developmental studies, "It's embarrassing, being in that class [basic math class]; and it's something that you feel like you should have learned in elementary school."

A subgrouping of adult students faced a different concern of inadequate knowledge and skill. This group often faced a *gap between their current knowledge level in content-specific subjects and the expected depth of student background knowledge assumed by faculty members.* These gaps were more often reported in mathematics, sciences, and engineering. As noted by one university student, "So I'm trying to learn all this 110 botany stuff about cell division and respiration. And I'm playing catch-up along with kids who have had all this...I feel really dumb. I feel stupid...I think because of my past education. I didn't have any college prep classes; I didn't have a foreign language. I only had one semester of high school algebra." This issue of entry with inadequate content knowledge was a particular subtheme for adults at the two public universities who were new entrants, for transfer students who entered into a different institutional setting, and for the students in adult degree programs who faced mathematics or statistics-related course work.

Because most four-year collegiate institutions do not determine adequacy of students' background knowledge for academic course placement, these new entry or reentry adults reported a variety of actions to resolve the problem. A number of adults reported that they enrolled in the local community college and took lead-up courses (particularly in mathematics and chemistry). As noted by one student, "Thank goodness I took the leadup classes to math [at the community college], because I would have been lost. So many people in the class [at the four-year college] were lost because they hadn't had anything up to that point to refresh." Some students used their co-workers, their adult classmates, their friends, or their children in college or high school to tutor them in background information. A number of adult students gathered high school texts or alternative basic texts to make up for information gaps or to refresh dusty memories of background foundational knowledge. A few students at Fremont University reported paying for tutoring services that bridged the perceived gap between their knowledge and conceptual understandings to meet the rapid pace and depth of expected understanding of the courses. A few students also found that they could learn better by repeating key foundational courses. They used the second time enrollment as a review for making sense of information, creating strong foundational knowledge structures to support later courses, and making a better grade that second time for their transcript.

A number of adults were disappointed when college faculty advised or placed them in courses requiring background knowledge they did not possess. "I found out on my own in the first day or two in class that I didn't have the background for this class. I needed to step back...I'm going to have to have precalculus before I have calculus, and have trigonometry before I can do statistics. And I felt I was advised poorly...nobody wanted to listen to what my experiences were or what my strong and weak areas were." These "lived experiences" reflected a gap between the level of background knowledge and the level of expected fluency of knowledge for current classroom instruction. Equally surprising was the majority of interviewed adults who entered or re-entered college who did not report any difficulty with a gap in knowledge or skills. Individuals who reported their discovery of inadequate background knowledge usually represented lower-division adult entrants in four-year institutions, as well as reentry adults who were engaged in science, math, and engineering related-courses.

There were two key themes reflecting the nature of adult resolution of uneven knowledge and skill grounds. One group who entered the community college lacked adequate basic skills to succeed. These individuals usually valued the placement testing and required involvement in the developmental studies program for reading, writing and mathematics skills. They saw these actions as helping them to succeed in college. The second key theme represented a group of adult students who expressed recognition of a gap between their current knowledge level in content-specific subjects and the expected depth of background knowledge assumed by faculty members. These individuals represented most often new entry or re-entry adults with a long break in enrollment who were in lower-division course work in four-year institutions, or who were involved in upper-division courses requiring related background knowledge in science, mathematics, or engineering. These individuals reported a variety of strategies to bridge these inadequacies in foundational knowledge. However, in this group, there was no systematic institutional intervention to aid adults in identifying these potential knowledge deficiencies.

Learning How to Learn and Study

Just as any life role has specialized knowledge and skills, these adults knew the student role required specialized tools of knowledge and skill to succeed. These adults assumed there were specific tools and skills in learning and in studying that were essential for successful academic learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Different groupings of adult students suggested varied beliefs and actions about the identification, use, and impact of these skills and knowledge in the academic setting.

For one adult student group, their *initial entry into the student role was dominated by "learning how to learn and how to study."* This group represented new entry adults, adults who had a lengthy gap in prior college enrollment, and adults who had not had earlier successes in the classroom. As noted by one reentry community college student upon attending his first classes,

> I think the first shock was when I looked around and everybody was taking notes and I wondered what they were writing. I didn't have any idea what they were writing. I mean I figured that they were writing what the teacher was talking about—but I didn't have any study skills or study habits.

These adults had to learn or relearn how to pay attention to lectures, write papers, take class notes, conduct library research, study for tests, and judge what information was important. This group spoke dominantly about learning how to memorize concepts, terminology, and hierarchical forms of information; these skills were viewed as "academic skills of learning." They identified the need and the specific actions to demonstrate these academic skills through faculty, fellow students, their past actions in studying from high school, as well as occasionally searching out literature on how to study. Most of these individuals reported that they expended great time and effort in studying and in creating a plan to manage their out-of-class time in support study activities.

For the second major groupings of adult students, reentry adults, *tools of learning and thinking were reinvigorated from general class involvement and studying* after a few months back in the classroom. Many reentry adults reported their reflections of past experiences as students in college. They also noted observing and occasionally questioning other students about specific learning/study actions. These adults often evaluated how they acted in the class, in studying, and in writing papers, in relation to past experiences. Most of these students could not directly articulate the specific actions or tools of learning and studying beyond global statements, such as note-taking or paying attention to the instructor. However, they usually reported that they were again able to perform as students with increasingly effective learning and study skills after a few weeks or months back in a collegiate student role. In this second group were reentry adults who had not been successful in college in their younger years. These adults selectively paid attention and focused their energies in studying and learning in particular areas of self-diagnosed need.

Although finding out how to study or learn was important to student success, there were *limited institutional programs or resources to develop or refine basic study skills and learning strategies.* Of the six research sites, Bayville Community College was the only site which offered a required study skills course with their developmental program. At this site, the study skills course was viewed as one of the most valuable courses. And when students were asked about their studying, Bayville students used the most diverse set of learning and study strategies of all of the sites. The adult degree program at Charles College offered an orientation workshop session which included study skills; its value was noted by a few adults in the interviewed group. However, most of the interviewed students believed that their institution did not offer instructional support for study skills, nor did most adults seek out faculty or staff regarding study skills instruction. Some of the students reported that faculty, usually in the community college, provided key guidance and instruction about ways to study and learn within the classroom instruction. "I think the instructors, whatever they recommend, I try to follow their recommended procedures. I mean, I feel that they're the experts on the subject and they're going to advise me which way is best to learn the material" [Elmwood].

Along with these beliefs about learning and studying, most adults also focused upon *developing time management strategies* for studying and developing priority times for their homework, reading, studying for tests, and writing papers. Time was a limited and needed resource for student learning and college participation. However, most attempted to mentally negotiate and balance their time investments between family, spouse, work, college, and sometimes continued involvement in church and community. Most believed that they were over committed and could not effectively provide the time and support to all of these important life obligations. New entrants, first-semester reentrants, and adult students in the accelerated adult degree program reported more focused energy spent in developing time management skills, prioritizing and allocating time and resources, and balancing student, work, family, and personal life roles. These individuals talked about creating a different way of living and acting in their personal lives. For reentry adults, there were also detailed, particularistic, and complex time management and resource schedules to meet perceived high demands of their employer, their children, their spouse, and their extended families. However, these individuals did not expend the perceived energy in creating or monitoring these actions. They spoke to their time management system as part of their assumed lifestyle, being creative in best utilizing their time and personal resources. For example, these students spoke of using commuting time to listen to either the faculty or their own taping of notes from a class, of using business trips as a good time source for intense studying, or of using Sunday afternoons as a family quiet time for studying.

Belief Strategies for Developing Learning and Studying

Most students reported their own personal efforts in creating or enhancing knowledge and skills in learning to learn and study. "I'm a person who didn't even study when I was a kid...[I had] no practice of studying, I didn't understand what to do. I'm still learning how to study." Most adults spoke to broad and nonspecific actions in their learning of study skills. These actions often included talking with others and asking them how they did certain things, observing others, or experimenting with alternative approaches. As part of this development of a personal set of strategies, adult students also noted their general concerns about this trial and error approach to developing study strategies. Thus, these adults reported certain beliefs and specialized processes which they believed related to successful studying and learning.

There were four strategies suggested by varied groupings of adults as they spoke to their learning how to learn and study in a collegiate environment. The *first strategy was focused on creating activities and organizers to help retain content knowledge* in its form of specialized terminology, key attributes, and key relationships to a knowledge category. These individuals reported developing rote memorization skills, repetitive reviews, as well as utilizing summaries and alternative forms of knowledge presentation (graphs, oral taping of notes, and of retyping hand-written notes into typed outlined notes). This strategy drew both upon the written course texts, faculty syllabus and lecture notes, as well as sometimes other collateral texts used by the student to make sense of the course (most often in mathematics and science courses). These individuals most often spoke to this strategy as the process to learn a new area of content totally unfamiliar to the student and his/her previous education. Often these students suggested that the knowledge was quite foreign and unfamiliar. They viewed themselves as trying to create a knowledge space in their memories in hopes that this new knowledge would eventually have personal meaning for them, as well as be anchored in memory to be easily recalled for tests and quizzes. This first strategy was most often reported by community college and new entrant adult students. "I put in a lot of time and...it is just repetition. And if I really run into something that I can't get into my head, I'll sit down with a pen and it might take three or four extra hours, but I'll sit down with a paper and summarize the materials. And that's a sure way to make it stick."

Many of the students also suggested a *second strategy for learning which mirrored the faculty's organization of the course* through both written and oral description of key concepts, ideas, events, and related skills. They viewed the faculty member as the expert to create the organization structure which highlighted the more significant and valued information concepts and their relationships. This grouping did not believe that students should memorize all content. Rather, they looked to the faculty member to provide a more streamlined and efficient approach to identifying key ideas, skills, and relationships for studying. "I concentrate on what the topic is and what the professor is lecturing about, rather than so much as to what's going on around me. . . . I find it very easy for me to follow the professor if I read before I come to class, follow the professor diligently in class and then read the material again. And it kind of drives the point home." In both this learning strategy of creating a learning framework which followed the faculty's organization and the first strategy of creating a system to retain through rote memorization and repetition of test-relevant knowledge, students believed that their fellow students were only valuable in providing a medium to identify the important knowledge, in organizing the knowledge for memorization, and creating interactive sessions to grill students in reinforcing effective recall of information from the faculty lectures and the course text. They did not view other students as creating an important medium for their own learning and understanding beyond the required course assessments.

The other two learning strategies moved beyond the concern for learning how to effectively perform in the classroom and the necessity for demonstrating specific recalled class information for examinations and grades. These two learning strategies were concerned about application of the course content, as well as a more conceptual understanding and broader meanings of key class knowledge. In the *third strategy, adult students noted the value of application of classroom knowledge in their own world of actions and practice.* Although they understood the necessity to recall key concepts, terms, and ideas, they wanted to learn in relation to the world beyond the classroom and applications that would be more personally meaningful and have practical consequences. As an example, the following comment represents an individual who entered the accounting program without experience. Part way through his program, he accepted a work position in accounting. He notes this shifting from rote memorization to his understandings of broader applications and practical uses.

> I know that when I first started taking accounting it was all rote memory. It was short term memory and it was gone. And then once I started working with it [in later courses and his position], somehow it was there in the back of my mind somewhere and it just sort of started dredging itself out and little by little it made sense...[I said to myself] "That is what I learned in class and it really works. This is the way they really do it out in the world."

This third strategy had both broadening, as well as limiting, elements. As adults, they actively viewed their learning of course content in tandem with their world of work and other related actions. Thus, they continually attempted to relate the course context with other parts of their world. This learning strategy often gave them broader and more informed applications in their world and family life. However, for some individuals, this desire for application became a tyranny of exclusion of learning materials which were not viewed as relevant or applicable to the adult life-world setting. The application for knowledge to other life roles was not only a helpful learning strategy; it was also a set of actions for judging and learning only select aspects of course content.

The *fourth strategy incorporated the interest in broader applications, but focused more dominantly upon developing deeply embedded conceptual meanings and understandings.* In this strategy, adults were not only interested in application, they were interested in the viability of knowledge for future study and practice, or in creating broader self-perspectives about this knowledge in relation to the world. As suggested by a Fremont student, "There are a few people who actually can mesh the material into what it means and how to apply it and actually understand the relationships of different material. Those are the ones that not only do excellent on exams, but a year from now, they'll still know enough about that subject to use it." There was also a strong belief in this subset of students that their primary goal was to develop tools for learning rather than memorizing quickly dated content. "Education will give you the tools in order to find that information that you need [for the future]." This group viewed the learning-how-to-learn process from a more metacognitive action, of understanding the concepts as intellectual knowledge as it related to other knowledge areas, as well as offering a set of lenses to understand, view, and act in the world. The group of adult students who more often reported this strategy were in the Charles adult degree program or in either Delta or Fremont public universities.

Summary of Learning How to Learn and Study

Adult students noted two orientations to their student role in relation to learning how to be effective learners and students. For those initial entry adult students, their beliefs were dominated by "learning how to learn and how to study." Reentry adults, however, spoke to a reinvigoration of their formal student tools of learning and thinking. Some students noted there were limited institutional programs and support for developing basic study skills and learning strategies. However, most students gained knowledge and skills in learning to learn and study from a personal set of strategies and actions. There were four key beliefs which included study and learning strategies, including: 1) creating activities and organizers to help faithfully retain exact content knowledge; 2) learning that mirrored the faculty's organization of the course and preferred areas of knowledge to be learned; 3) valuing and focusing learning on the application of classroom knowledge in their own world of actions and practice; and 4) incorporating the interest in broader applications, but focusing more dominant concern upon developing deeply embedded conceptual meanings and understandings.

KEY BACKGROUND BELIEFS AND PERCEIVED INFLUENCES ON THE ADULT STUDENT ROLE

Although entry and socialization of adult students was an important perspective in understanding initial interactions between adult students and the collegiate institution, equally important was the understanding of adult beliefs about the undergraduate student role and how these beliefs influenced possible learning actions. This illumination of adult beliefs about the undergraduate student role represented key perceptual frameworks which guided adult actions in the classroom, as well as within the collegiate institution. In particular these adult students perceived and experienced certain conditions unique to themselves and their adult student contemporaries. The following discussions will present five key themes of adult student role beliefs, including: 1) perceiving the paradox of being an older age student; 2) living with a changing identity and adult life concerns; 3) perceiving age as an influencer of learning; 4) viewing learning as different across the disciplines; and 5) describing differing perspectives of academic and real world knowledge.

In examining these key themes of beliefs and influences of the adult student role, it is important to remember that the interviewed adults were all continuing enrolled students who had experienced academic success (as defined by acceptable academic standing). At this point in their academic journey, these adults were very proud of their accomplishments in college, were aware that they would probably complete their degree, and knew that they were making passable, if not superior, grades. Yet, these adults noted unique beliefs from the adult life role perspective which framed their view of learning in the classroom and their relationship to the broader institutional context.

Being an Adult Student: Paradox of Being an Older Age Student

The majority of adult students were concerned about their ability to act effectively in the student role because of their adult age and multiple life roles. Many felt discomfort because they were older than the younger undergraduate college student group and represented a different kind of student who had work, family, and community responsibilities. One key subtheme for a subgroup of these adults, particularly new entry or reentry with significant break in enrollment, was an *initial belief of the college student role as primarily for young adults.* They initially perceived themselves to be out of place in a college classroom and campus. Many assumed that adult involvement as an undergraduate student was viewed as an inappropriate-age behavior, and that older adults probably should not be college students. They initially believed their presence in the college classroom suggested that they had not been bright enough to complete college work during their young adult years. Thus, they often came onto campus and into the classroom believing that others would judge them as undesirable. As stated by one community college student, "The personal difficulty was that sometimes being forty-two years of age—being old enough to be the parent of a lot of the students in my classes and just walking around the campus, especially around faculty who are my contemporaries—I just would sometimes feel so stupid." They initially saw themselves as inferior to the students and faculty currently on the campus and of lesser value to the college administration.

Of the four sites with intergenerational academic programs, adult students at Delta University expressed the strongest feelings of incongruence between the adult student role and the collegiate environment. These perceptions could have come, in part, from the nature of this institution which did not have a major academic program structure, delivery systems, or institutional policies serving adult students. As noted by one of the Delta students, "You're in an environment of mostly kids that you don't relate to, that you really don't have a lot in common with; so you feel kind of ostracized and [without] a lot of respect. You feel kind of like you are on your own." Possibly because of the evening school structure, students at Fremont did not report the strong beliefs of age discomfort. The community college environment often reflected a more age-heterogeneous environment. Adult students in these two community colleges also did not voice feelings of being judged because of their age. However, adults in these four environments of intergenerational academic programs did report differences in initial comfort and in the nature of classroom interactions between courses which were dominantly young adult and those which had a good representation of adult students (often in evening courses). It was evident that the intergenerational academic programs, a more youth-dominated campus, or a youth-dominated course were pivotal cultural factors in these concerns of age.

In addition to the initial discomfort in their age, a select group of adults often felt initial discomfort based upon their past life accomplishments. These adults made comparative judgements about themselves in relation to other young student and faculty age-related accomplishments. They initially assessed themselves to be inferior, because they believed that they should be more accomplished for their age. They assumed their adult age status in life should be linked to a more significant level of personal and societal accomplishment. Some believed they were being judged negatively by the institution and society based upon their background of not pursuing college work or of stopping out of college or high school in their young adult years. They viewed their young adult actions as a reflection of their inferiority in the current college environment. Many regretted losing those years without a college degree completion and the potential difference that a college education would have made to their lives. These beliefs and feelings were both a motivator to pursuing and completing the degree and also providing special initial anxieties and concerns about fitting into the college classroom.

Although these feelings, beliefs, and experiences of being older in a young person's environment were very real, *most adults discovered a comfort zone during the first month of classes.* This adult student comfort zone was created either through messages from faculty and students supportive of them, or from their own self beliefs about their commitment to a college education. Most adults noted making initial judgments about this comfort zone during the first classes.

> Well you walk into the classroom, and I noticed the first thing—I was trying to find out if there was anyone older than me. And thank goodness. I felt

> better after I had seen older people. But, of course, everyone looked so young. I noticed as time has gone on now—they don't all look quite as young as they used to look. And I've learned I am far from being the oldest one in here.

Another student noted, "What I found in every case was just a misconception on my part. No one thought any less of me for being my age, as compared to their age; it was all in my mind." However, some adults had not found that comfort zone. These adults believed that adults should maintain a separation from the regular college community. "They [older students] know their place in school; but they have their home lives as well, so they're really not looking for that full comfort from the college life."

These adult students discovered that they *were not judged and graded negatively in the classroom based upon their age.* As one student reported, "And you're not perceived by age, you're perceived generally by your contribution in class and the way you conduct yourself." In addition, some students were initially concerned that they would be treated with feigned acceptance or in a patronizing manner. As noted by one student at Delta University, "I haven't really had anyone treat me like I'm old enough to be their father. And I appreciate that. I don't want it. I don't like being treated as an elder." These adults desired to be accepted for themselves. They did not want to be given preferential treatment, nor did they desire to be discriminated against because of their age. Adult students who were concerned about an age-judging college climate came from the four intergenerational collegiate settings. This sensitivity and concern about their age and others' judgement of them based upon age, again reflected their perceptions and initial expected college judgements in a youth-dominant environment.

While most adults acclimated to adult student life, a subgrouping of adult students in intergenerational academic programs (public universities and community colleges) spoke about *disguising themselves as younger students.* Some students (in their thirties) reported dressing like younger students, not divulging information that would suggest their age, and acting incognito (not appearing to be like older students). These students believed they enjoyed more social camaraderie with their younger classmates. Some students also believed that faculty who viewed them as younger students judged their work on an easier standard than if they were viewed as older students. Often these students believed that they had to take on the part of a younger student to fit into the collegiate environment. As reported by one student who left his full-time job to participate as a full-time student, "Instead of coming to class, then leaving and going home, I would usually come here early in the morning, camp out in the library, do work, go to class, eat here, go to class, go to the library. In other words, I behaved like an on-campus [young] student. That allowed me to get to know a lot of people more quickly [and feel more comfortable]." Most adult students did not disguise their age. They felt at ease to share their current adult life status. Their younger classmates were often surprised to learn that they were adult students with work and family responsibilities. These younger students often noted their earlier belief that the adult students were younger in appearance and action, like a mid-twenties undergraduate. With good humor, these adult student voiced their appreciation at these flattering comments. Adult students found an acceptance and often a valuing by younger students about who they truly were—adult students with families, jobs, and adult life experiences.

Summary of the Paradox of Being an Older Adult Student

Many of the new entry adult students noted their initial belief of the college student role as primarily for young adults. They came into this specializing environment assuming that they would not be accepted. However, most adults discovered acceptance and support during the first month of classes. In particular, they found that they were not judged or graded negatively in the classroom based upon their age. Curiously, some adults felt that they needed to maintain a detachment because they could not be traditional college students. In addition, some adults reported disguising themselves as younger students, either to develop a social network with regular college students or to gain more supportive assistance from faculty.

Being an Adult Student: Adult Life as It Influences the Student Role

The influence of adult life issues, challenges, and changes on student role involvement was another major theme for adult student. These adult students believed that who they were as adults in their current life circumstances and who they became as adults after degree completion was a significant part of their learning journey.

Adult students viewed *their lives as continuously conflicting with their desire to fully participate in the student role.* "In so many ways, you have more responsibilities to your environment, your world, your spouse. There's a lot of other forces that pull at you and distract you from what you're trying to focus on in education...It's hard to overcome the distractions of everyday living." For a number of adults, these stresses and strains were a key distractor affecting their concentration and creating guilt about their divided attentions among the various adult life roles. It was very evident that these adults often felt significant stress and conflict with adequately performing in all of their significant life roles, including the student role. In particular, traumatic adult life circumstances strongly influenced the student role for some adults. As reported by one Bayville Community College student who was a dislocated worker,

> I came to school. I mean I was very sensitive. Here I was—thirty-nine years old, an adult male thinking I've got all of these roles. I'm supposed to be a father; I'm supposed to be a husband; I'm supposed to be the major bread winner. And I was not doing well—the major bread winner role especially. And so I was pretty sensitive. I was going through mid-life crisis for sure, which affected my emotions a lot. And I am dealing with it pretty well, I think; but there is no way ever to get over it. And so, the sensitivity that I had, I mean—if the teacher had been grumpy, it would have probably hurt my feelings, and so positive attitudes of instructors have helped a lot.

Some adult students also observed other adults experiencing life transitions and their impact upon class involvement. However, most students did not report life transitions as a pivotal entry influence. Rather, they suggested that adult life circumstances were the grounding which caused difficulty in fulfilling the student role, as well as the catalyst to pursue college work. This perspective was in contrast to past research suggesting life transitions were an essential trigger for entry and initial transition into the student role (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989.) As viewed by one student, "I think a lot of returning students bring a lot of negative baggage with them. A lot of times, people are involved in divorce or [they] are trying to fulfill a personal need by going to school." Many students suggested it was the many responsibilities and roles of an adult that make the student role difficult. As noted in the discussion on adult life roles, many adults often brought with them major life concerns which influenced their involvement in college and their engagement in learning.

Adult students reported *several coping strategies for handling the stresses and strains of life responsibilities and the related time and resource conflicts with the student role.* Attempting to mentally detach their concerns and difficult life conditions from their participation in the classroom was one major coping strategy with stress. They believed that as adults they should keep their private lives separate from the classroom. However, many adult students found that it was, at times, difficult to suppress work conflicts, family problems, or self-doubts in the collegiate environment. Many noted an interior life of student involvement which was interwoven with these many difficult personal feelings and experiences. Believing they were mature adults, they attempted to focus on the student role while they were in the classroom and in study activities. Many suggested that they internally attempted to focus on the immediacy of class involvement, believing that their participation in each class would create a better life for themselves and their families.

A second coping strategy to handle adult life role stresses featured rearrangement and renegotiation of life responsibilities. These actions to lessen the conflicting role and time demands were directed to spouse, family, and employer. Most often the adult student found limited options to change responsibilities at the work site, while spouse and children, church and community were the key areas where adult students made resource and time allocation changes.

Many adult students also saw their *life commitments and past experiences providing an important support base for more effective learning*. They judged their maturity and life experiences to aid in understanding the relationships of knowledge to current and past life events. For example one student noted,

> I think that it is easier for me. I have an advantage because of my maturity or because of what I've been through to grasp things that others have not been able to, because they didn't have the experience...I am able to see things in a broader way and understand them more comprehensively than the average student.

Many adults also believed that past experiences had helped them to be more committed and dedicated in the student role. In comparison to young students, they believed that they knew how precious a college education was and how important learning would be for their future. Another student reflected on his past life and future possibilities and noted,

> I think once you've really gotten out and worked full time and realized that [there is prejudice] for people without degrees. And when you're older and you already have a family in place, it makes you view it [a college education] a lot more seriously and a lot differently. Whereas, right out of high school, you're "foot loose and fancy free" and you're looking for other things. And I think that makes a difference.

Many adults valued the student role in adult life, because they believed *the student role allowed them to be a different person or to enhance their self-identity.* "When you're a student—you're on your own merit cause I'm that different person to other people [in the college classroom]...and they listen to what you say." Many people viewed the student role and their learning engagement as speaking directly to their personal development, self-enhancement, and ego building. As suggested by a women at Delta, "I think for me it builds my self-esteem to do this. I can honestly say I am enjoying it much more than I ever did as an eighteen-year-old or nineteen-year-old going back."

Summary of Adult Life as it Influences the Student Role

Many adults viewed their adult student role as significantly influenced by conflicting life responsibilities and time resource commitments. Often these adults reported one of two coping strategies for the related stresses and conflicts. These adults reported either: 1) attempting to mentally detach their concerns and difficult life conditions from their participation in the classroom, or 2) rearranging or renegotiating life responsibilities. Adult students also believed that current adult life commitments as well as their past experiences provided an important support base for more effective learning. In particular, some adults believed that the student role supported their development as persons and enhanced their self-identity.

Being an Adult Student: Age As It Influences Learning

Many students held personal beliefs about the influence of their age on the ability to learn and perform academically. Three major subthemes were suggested by these adults regarding age and its influence on learning. Many adults believed that the *aging process made it difficult to memorize or remember.* Often these beliefs were reported by adult students in the community college setting and in the accelerated adult degree program at Allerton. A student at Bayville Community College reported, "However, at my age it is hard to memorize. I keep thinking something's gotta come out—for more input to come in! It's full! Overloaded!" A student at Elmwood Community College noted, "I'm a slow reader, so that takes a long time. Returning students, you know, your mind doesn't work as quickly as it did when it was 18 or 20." Beyond the difficulties of memorization and recall, many also mentioned age-related decrements in vision or hearing, as well as energy levels. Most believed that good study habits meant that they designed a number of strategies to compensate. Thus, these adults chose to sit closer to the instructor to better see and hear the instructor. They developed strategies for reading and studying which balanced their physical and mental capabilities with the demands of the course. Most noted that they were methodical and systematic in their studying. As noted by one student, "I don't consider myself very smart. I slog. I just go over and over and over and over and I've gotten a lot better with school. I mean I understand what it takes...I am much better at picking out what is important." Many of these students who believed that they were "slower learners," reported spending more time in studying and in repetitious review of material. A student at Allerton College adult degree program reported, "It's a lot harder for me than it was twenty years ago; I guess it's due to the aging process. I don't know. It's harder to get there [remembering the material] and it's harder to keep it in there...Repetition...that's the only way I could do it."

From an opposite perspective, many reentry adults believed that their *learning process was aided by their age and experiences in life.*

> There is a tendency to believe that the older you get, the less it can...be retained in your brain, in your memory. I was never a believer of that, because that is not that logical to me. I think, it can get much better, because it has a lot to do with motivation. If you are motivated you can learn anything at anytime. I do not believe that I have more difficulties learning than any younger person. I think I have an advantage actually, it is easier for me. It is definitely easier for me now to learn and to study than it was 20-25 years ago.

These adult students believed that maturity helped them create significant and important learning connections. In comparative reflection with their youth and younger adult students in the classroom, many of these students valued being an adult, a mature student. Many noted the value of knowing who they were, of being more relaxed or more in control of their sense of self. As suggested by one Delta student, "I think it has to do with more of a broad mindset about where I am in my life and being comfortable with who I am and being secure—of being physically and spiritually fit, of being relaxed, of not sweating the small stuff." Another female Delta student suggested,

> I enjoy being back in college and not having to think about—dating, or the girl-boy thing. I mean, it lifts so much off your shoulders when you're not trying to meet someone, or all the other things that go with being young and that age and the parties. It's such a load off my mind to just come and learn; and that's what I'm here for.

Some students also believed that their age made a significant difference in understanding the meaning of certain course content. "It's a waste for a nineteen-year-old...to read Tennessee Williams. You can't understand that kind of stuff—

you can read that they're great word smiths and it's artistic; but you don't really understand what's going on. If youth is wasted on the young, well, so is literature."

These *adults believed that because of their age they were positive role models* on younger adults and children. Many adult undergraduates believed they were positive influences on other students because they came back as adults to pursue a college degree. They believed that their unique age-related commitment to the student role could influence other younger students to also make a more serious commitment to the student role. "Most of the adult students are fairly dedicated. I mean most of them are here for a real good reason; they want to get something out of their education. They want to advance or improve themselves. So over all, I find that the adult students are very positive role models." A number of adult students reported that their student learner role was a positive influence on their children in elementary and high school, as well as creating a bit of positive competition with their children who were in college. Others reported that they either had influenced their spouse to enter college or they had been influenced by their spouse to enroll because of the spouse's prior positive enrollment as an adult undergraduate student.

Summary of Being an Adult Student: Age As It Influences Learning

There were three key themes concerning the perceptions of age as it influenced learning. Many adults believed that the aging process made it difficult to memorize or remember. Another group of adults viewed the learning process as aided by their age and experiences in life. In addition, a number of adults viewed themselves as positive role models because of their age.

Being an Adult Learner: Identifying Different Learning Modes in Different Disciplines

Adult students reported commonly held perceptions about the learning differences between classes in the sciences and engineering versus classes in the behavioral/social sciences, humanities, and selected professional studies. These perceptions were noted by upper-division students in a four-year college or university settings. In courses of social sciences, humanities, education and business, adult students valued a learning process that went beyond the lecture and short-term memorization. Many of the adult students believed that *learning in the humanities, behavioral/social sciences, and the professional studies of business and education focused upon a search for meaning and understanding.* They reported that faculty in these disciplines often engaged in active participation and consideration of different perspectives among the class members. These adult students believed that they learned best and gained a sense of long-term meaning by anchoring their understanding of concepts within this class integration of life experiences. Faculty in such courses actively engage students in the learning and meaning-making process. "Rather than a lecture, it was a way of [having an] interactive community." There was a greater sense of collegiality in the learning process between students and faculty in these disciplines.

Courses in the sciences, engineering, and mathematics were viewed as lecture and memorization courses. Many students reported that the typical faculty member lectured without much concern for student understanding or student retention. These students did not see themselves actively involved in the classroom learning process, other than taking good notes or when possible asking clarifying questions about the content. They had no awareness of a learning community in the classroom. While faculty in the non-science-oriented courses appeared to value questions and dialogue with students, most faculty in the science-oriented courses appeared to dislike student interaction. There was a perceived ethos of "sink or swim"; either you learn it or you shouldn't be in the course. Non-science-oriented courses, on the other hand, were believed to focus on purposefully helping all students to understand and succeed. Occasionally, students would commend special faculty members in the science area who approached the course from a different set of instructional strategies. As noted by one student regarding a valued chemistry professor at Delta University,

> He has got a way about teaching that sinks in. He translates the material in the book on the blackboard, so we can understand it...'cause the books are mathematical, they're engineering books. And they just give you a formula and they give you a problem and they won't show you how to do the problem. They just give you the answer to the problem. And he pretty much translates it so...we know how to do the problem.

Many students noted the value of science-oriented faculty who provided this bridging role or translator role. These adult students valued faculty who provided assistance in understanding and applying formulas and in resolving course-related problem homework sets. Adult students looked for understanding and meaning from these faculty. They desired science-oriented faculty who offered learning experiences that supported a focus on translating the unknown into student knowing.

Several students across all research settings commented on this perceived division in instruction and meaning expectations between the sciences and the humanities/social sciences/professional courses. "[In English] a lot of it you come to your own realization on things. But I think like with algebra or something more scientific that it's probably more of a lecture." This division was also expressed in how students handled gaps in currency of knowledge and skill between these two broad discipline areas. Most students found faculty in the social sciences and the humanities to be helpful and willing to provide guidance. For example, a student at Bayville noted, "It seems like the teachers in your social sciences, like psychology and sociology, are more understanding and compassionate, than your natural sciences teachers, like chemistry and biology." Further, most students found that their institution (community college or public university) provided additional supports for the humanities, social sciences, and professional studies courses. However, in the sciences and engineering, students were often left to their own resources to figure out how to gain background knowledge. (Because of the research study focus on upper-division, business-related majors in the adult degree programs, only limited perspectives of these different learning modes in different disciplines were presented by these adult students.)

Being an Adult Student: Experiencing Dichotomies of Academic and Real World Knowledge

For many reasons, adult students often saw themselves as learners juggling with different types of knowledge and knowing. Adult students often spoke to either creating separate mental compartments or defining and judging their learning actions in either of two different ways of learning. Some adult students differentiated between academic learning—learning in the classroom which included theory and memorization—and real world learning—learning which could be applied directly to the adult's daily actions in the world. Other students spoke to similar dichotomies between theory versus practical information, or between life experience learning and decontextualized facts, terms, and concepts. Adult workers seemed to express these dichotomies the most vividly. These adults came into the collegiate environment embedded within their particular work practice and actions. In their efforts to make sense and meaning of the course work and assignments relative to their real world involvement, students struggled to articulate the difference between "academic learning" and "real learning." "For myself personally [I try] to see if I'm really learning it for knowledge or just learning it for the class. You know how sometimes you can learn something and you just memorize it for the time...." Another example was given by a community college student,

> I tend to take everything with a grain of salt because I know what we're learning in school is book learning. It's not practical application outside the classroom. Some of the instructors tend to forget that. And the young students take it verbatim. You know, if they do this...this is exactly what they're going to do when they get out. [My strategy for course participation is] going though this as a basic course—so you can generalize, so you can get a feel of how things are going to go [in the real world].

This perspective of the experiences of learners in different knowledge and learning domains has been formally described by a number of theorists, including Sternberg and Wagner (1986), Scribner (1986), and Lave & Wenger (1991). These researchers have described these domains through constructs, such as practical intelligence, practical thinking, tacit knowledge, situated learning and situated cognition versus formal cognition, academic knowledge, or theoretical thinking. The most recent theoretical discussions have drawn upon social constructivism and suggested that knowledge, knowing, and learning are acts of social relationship. For example, Lave and Wenger discussed the nature of learning embedded in real-world situated activity.

> ...The situatedness of activity appeared to be anything but a simple empirical attribute of everyday activity or a corrective to conventional pessimism about informal, experience-based learning. Instead, it took on the proportions of a general theoretical perspective, the basis of claims

> about the relational character of knowledge and learning, about the negotiated character of meaning, and about the concerned (engaged, dilemma-driven) nature of learning activity for the people involved. That perspective meant that there is no activity that is not situated. It implied emphasis on comprehensive understanding involving the whole person rather than "receiving" a body of factual knowledge about the world; on activity in and with the world; and on the view that agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other. (p. 33)

They proposed that situated learning does occur in a different way from learning about propositional knowledge or constitutive knowledge structures, which are the focus of academic knowledge and instruction. Adult students who noted such knowledge differences brought a very dynamic form of situated learning into the classroom. They struggled to make meaning through these dichotomies of academic and real world learning. They also made judgements about the nature of academic knowledge, its utility and value, and relevancy to their lives.

In differentiated adult student judgements about the nature of knowledge and its utility, there were five different types of voices. One group of adults tried to make sense of required lower-division liberal arts or general education courses in relation to their current work and career goals. These adults reported discovering that they took a pragmatic approach to the value of the learning experiences in these general education courses. They *judged these courses to be necessary academic knowledge, as foundational for more relevant, helpful, and meaningful learning in upper-division work.* In essence, learning in the lower-division classes was an acknowledged prelude to the real, the important, and the relevant learning to come (which would focus upon specialized knowledge). One Bayville student, when attempting to apply knowledge from lower-division statistics and economics to a work situation reported, "Unfortunately both times, the instructors really have said that [kind of application is] not really possible yet, you're not that far advanced. This is just a survey course and you'll have to learn a lot more to be able to really apply it."

A second group of students judged their involvement with specific content in relation to their current professional standing and current work practice. This group thought that *learning was a reinforcement, a further illumination of their past knowledge, or an authentication of their expertise.* As suggested by one Elmwood student, "I think I'm here in school not so much to learn more, and I guess I am here to learn; but to demonstrate or to authenticate what I already know." Often these students viewed themselves as already having knowledge from the real world setting which they believed was also part of the academic world. However, they needed to prove to their employer and work colleagues that they were knowledgeable as documented by a college credential. This subgrouping was very critical of instructors who would suggest other perspectives of the academic or real world knowledge which were not congruent with the students' own lived experiences. They viewed their world of knowledge anchored within their own culture; academic knowledge perspectives had limited value beyond a reinforcement of the students' perspectives and experiences.

A third subgrouping of students entered classes with a *critical and judgmental evaluation of academic content.* Because of these strong judgements against the value of academic knowledge, they often studied course content for the short-term and for rote-memorization. They focused upon grades and meeting stated requirements for testing of academic knowledge. When they did experience academic content which they judged to be real world knowledge, they studied for long-term, meaningful understanding and application of knowledge. In the main, they viewed academic knowledge as being a faculty-student game or diversion within the college, but of limited relevancy for themselves and their lives. They did occasionally, however, locate academic content (often with the guidance of the instructor) that held relevance for future real world application.

The fourth group *valued both academic and real world knowledge, but came at academic knowledge from its embeddedness in real world knowing.* These adult students believed that academic knowledge was relevant and meaningful. They believed it provided valuable ways of understanding, of using more precise terminology, and of perspectives and skills to act upon their everyday world. As suggested by an Allerton student who was a full-time worker,

> It's helping me in my job some. It's hard to quantify...you get a gut feel for things and you learn a lot by common sense...So much of that stuff [academic knowledge] that we learned in class...I knew way down deep. If I was confronted with that situation, I handled it usually in the way that the textbook states in some cases or one of the alternatives. There might be a good alternative. But I couldn't sit down and write it down in the terms that it was put...analysis of what you are doing is...not there when you are actually doing it...So you learn how to verbalize it better.

The final group represented adult students who *desired to become part of this academic world and viewed their full immersion in the academic knowledge base* as an important part of that effort. They saw the learning of academic knowledge as opening doors to a new world and creating a bridge of understanding between these two systems of knowing. Because these adults also lived and acted in the real world of work and family, they also saw practical knowledge as being a valued accompaniment of academic knowledge. These adults often made assumptions that theory and concepts were often not specifically applicable to the real world; however, academic knowledge provided perspectives and ways of understanding their world. They often worked at making connections of meaning and of application between the academic knowledge and real world knowledge in their lives. But foremost they saw themselves as travelers in a new land of cognitive knowledge where they could put on new "knowledge lenses" to see and judge the world—including their world of work and personal life—in new and different ways.

Summary of Being an Adult Student: Experiencing Dichotomies of Academic and Real World Knowledge

These adult students experienced differentiated judgements about the nature of knowledge and its utility between academic and real world knowledge. There were five different types of voices or subthemes in this category. One subgroup theme judged current lower-division courses to be necessary academic knowledge, as foundational for more relevant, helpful, and meaningful learning in upper-division work. A second subgroup theme considered learning as a reinforcement, a further illumination of their past knowledge, or an authentication of their expertise. These individuals continued to hold this belief in real knowledge as the dominant and valued form of knowledge in their lives. A third subgroup theme was suggested by students who entered classes with a critical and judgmental evaluation of academic content. They elected to learn academic content when it was relevant and applicable to real world actions. The fourth subgroup theme valued both academic and real world knowledge, but came at academic knowledge from its embeddedness in real world knowing. Thus, they came to further understand their real world actions from the frame of knowledge, theory, and constructs of academic knowledge. The final subgroup theme represented adult students who desired to become part of this academic world and viewed their full immersion in the academic knowledge base as an important part of that effort. They made active bridging of understanding and meaning transfer between academic and real world knowledge.

SUMMARY

The entry and socialization of adults into the undergraduate student role was a highly complex phenomenon. Adult students presented differing beliefs and actions in their initial entry or reentry, in their student role socialization process and in their beliefs about themselves in the student role. This chapter identified five adult student groups who illustrated both common and divergent themes in their examination. These groups included:

- **New entry adults**
- **Reentry adults with a significant gap from previous enrollment**
- **Reentry adults participating in a four-year college which was perceived as more competitive**
- **Reentry adults participating in a similar college to prior enrollments**
- **Reentry adults in a unique structured adult-degree program [Allerton]**

These groups reflected differentiated beliefs and actions in the key categories of entry and socialization into the student role and of the influence of adult beliefs about the student role. As portrayed in the table of Categories and Themes of Beliefs and Actions about the Student Role by Adult Undergraduates at the close of this summary, there were 13 major categories representing both beliefs about entry and socialization into the student role, as well as beliefs about key influences in the student role. In examining each of these categories, the five distinct adult student groupings presented both unique themes within the category, as well as sometimes common belief themes among several of the groupings. These themes and their presence or absence in specific adult student groups suggested an interaction of constructed meaning of the adult student experience in relation to adulthood, the student role, the particular collegiate environment, and the substance of the academic program experience. It was evident that there were subtle and diverse beliefs among students within an institutional setting, as well as between settings. It was also evident that the adult undergraduate students were significantly influenced by their awareness of their mature adult age status and the aging process, by awareness of their undergraduate student role being defined through traditional younger college students, and by their awareness of the interdependency and sometimes conflict between adult roles of work, family, community, and student.

Perspectives of New Entry Adult Students and of Reentry Adult Students with a Significant Gap in Previous Enrollment

These two adult groups, new entry adult students and reentry lower-division adult students with significant gaps between enrollment, often spoke of similar beliefs and actions in their current student role. These two groups held a dominant initial focus upon actions for successful entry into the student role. They believed that their past non-academic life experiences or their historic young adult experiences in college were of little value in the current entry into an academically successful student experience. It was evident that these individuals viewed themselves as outsiders entering a very complex cultural environment. These students actively engaged in developing an understanding and belief system about their role and place within the college. They often faced serious issues of age and the aging process which they believed impacted their ability to learn and to fit into the college culture. They were also significantly concerned about learning the "ways of doing and knowing in a student role" to meet the external judgements of faculty and students. In the initial months or semesters of enrollment, they placed significant emphasis on external judgements by faculty and other students as feedback for their future success. Lastly, these individuals were more likely to bring uneven skill and knowledge background into their college work; yet they saw these deficiencies as indicators of areas of improvement to be successful.

Reentry Adults who Transferred into a Four-Year College Environment Perceived to be More Competitive

Student beliefs and actions of this third group of reentry adult students were influenced by their assumption that they had entered a more competitive and potentially different kind of academic environment. This group viewed part of their entry in similar themes to the first two groups of new entry and reentry students with significant gaps between enrollments. However, these adults also presented certain unique themes related to their own set of experiences. This group of students initially illustrated beliefs and actions of new entry students. They were extremely concerned about identifying appropriate roles, behaviors, and other related factors which would influence their adaptation and success. They perceived the new college environment to expect a different and perhaps higher standard of knowledge and action in the student role. They were anxious because they suspected they might have greater difficulty in being successful in this more competitive environment. However, after initial feedback of success in course work and perceived acceptance by faculty and students, these adults often quickly moved into actions and beliefs represented by the student group of reentry adults entering into similar college climates. They had confidence in themselves and focused upon enhancing their performance. They also displayed more differentiating judgements and actions about the collegiate learning experience after their initial self-examining and adapting period of entry into a new four-year college environment.

Reentry Adults Participating in a Similar College Climate

In comparison to the earlier groupings, there was a different set of beliefs and action perspectives in the student role by reentry adults who were experiencing a similar college environment to their previous enrollment (either by transferring but maintaining continuous enrollment, or re-enrolling after a time gap in participation as a student). These adult students saw themselves as having prior external and internal validation of their success as students. Therefore their entry focused upon quick adaptation and enhancement of their college learning role. They reflected on a more internal set of personal judgements about themselves and the collegiate learning environment. Judgements of faculty, as well as fellow students, did not hold the dominant standard for their beliefs in self or in their actions in the classroom. Unlike the other three groupings, this group of adult students was more likely to be in upper-division work and in an academic specialization at the public university, or have enrolled in the adult-degree program at Charles College. This grouping also illustrated more diverse perspectives about the relationship between their current adult roles and the roles of knowledge and learning. They spoke to more complex viewpoints on their own engagement in the learning process, as well as their making meaning of these student learning experiences.

Reentry Students in a Uniquely Structured Adult Degree Program [Allerton]

There were several unique themes represented by the reentry students who enrolled in the Allerton adult degree program. Although these individuals more often voiced themes similar to the previous groups of reentry adults who either were moving into a more academically competitive environment or reentry adults moving into a similar collegiate environment, these adult students at Allerton also voiced several unique beliefs in comparison to the other adult groupings. One unique perspective was their concern for the accelerated program and program format. Although adult degree program entry was often viewed as an easier transition than entry into a more youth-dominated college culture, these adults noted different anxieties about their ability to succeed. These customized features which were created to support the background and needs of adult students were often viewed as unknown elements in predicting their future student success. They often voiced concern about the ability to make it through this highly compressed program. In other key themes, they voiced more predominant concerns for valuing and expecting knowledge applications to their current work world. Because of the dominant ethos of the academic program on work applications, their beliefs about learning and knowledge were clearly shaped by this orientation. Lastly, because the program solely focused upon upper-division course work related to applied business management, these adults usually did not report difficulties with uneven knowledge and skill backgrounds which influenced their ability to learn, nor did they report experiences of differentiated modes of inquiry and learning among the disciplines.

Adult Construction of Beliefs and Actions in the Student Role

The constructing of a set of beliefs and actions regarding the student role was not a unitary experience for these adult undergraduates. Adult students constructed meanings and actions in their new world of student through their specific past educational and personal histories. Adult beliefs were equally influenced through their own sense of self-identity, their sense of age-related life status, and their immediate environment of family, friends, work, and other life roles. Many of these adults noted retrospective images of themselves experiencing, adapting, and shaping beliefs about their engagement in college classroom and their own roles as learners. These dominant retrospective images reflected an awareness of being an older student; of being influenced by adult life roles in their student role; and of being influenced in their learning because of their older age. These students reported a major concern for both fitting into the collegiate culture and into a successful student learning role. Most of these adults also reported a current image of themselves in the midst of their academic work or in the process of exiting the student role for graduation. In this current image of student, they spoke to their current actions as learners who had acquired specialized learning and study skills, who had confidence in themselves within the collegiate learner role, and who also acted as judge of faculty, class activities, and the collegiate environment. They spoke to experiencing and creating different sets of actions based upon the differentiation of attitude, climate, and learning expectations between the sciences and mathematics-related field and the humanities, behavioral sciences, and selected professional fields. In addition, these students represented four varied perspectives about a believed dichotomy between academic and real world knowledge. These students voiced a variety of relationships and value positions in understanding their adult life world of "real and lived" knowledge with their student life world focused on academic knowledge.

The following table, **Categories and Themes of Beliefs and Actions about Entry, Socialization, and Influences on the Student Role by Adult Undergraduates,** provides a more delineated outline to these previous discussions.

This chapter examined the interior world of the adult student who was experiencing entry or reentry into the student role, was becoming socialized into that student role, and was constructing and acting on beliefs which influenced their adult student role. The next chapter will focus upon adult students' beliefs and actions of learning within the college classroom and of the learning transactions between life roles and student role. At the conclusion of the next chapter, the discussions from this chapter will be further examined as part of adult student beliefs about engagement in the learning enterprise as defined through the college classroom context.

TABLE 1
Categories and Themes of Beliefs and Actions about Entry, Socialization and Influences on the Student Role by Adult Undergraduates

Key Category	New entry - Key themes	Reentry - Significant Gap in enrollment - Key themes	Reentry - Transfer to 4-year more competitive climate - Key themes	Reentry - Participate in similar college climate & reentry adult degree program - Charles College students - Key themes	Reentry - Uniquely structured adult degree program - Allerton College - Key themes
ENTRY PROCESS					
Becoming a member of the academic community	Proving success in student role to self and others; Determining how to act as a student learner or designing a series of short term goals; Initial anxieties; Discovering student success	Proving success in student role to self and others; Determining how to act as a student learner or designing a series of short term goals; Initial anxieties; Discovering student success			
Adapting to a different culture			Observing and judging others; Initial anxieties; Adapting to climate and judging new academic climate	Observing and judging others; Initial anxieties; Adapting to climate and judging new academic climate	Observing and judging others; Initial anxieties; Adapting to climate and judging new academic climate; Fears about accelerated curriculum and program format
Student role and self knowledge	Self change in student role	Self change in student role			
Avoidance of college socialization				Avoidance of collegiate socialization	Avoidance of collegiate socialization
Institutional supports for entry	Faculty & staff support/ acceptance; developmental studies; Institutional support (community colleges)	Faculty & staff support/ acceptance; developmental studies; Institutional support (community colleges)	Faculty & staff support/ acceptance	Faculty, staff & program support/acceptance; adult support services	Staff and program support
SOCIALIZATION PROCESS					
Stairstepping from prior experiences	Student role as a "work ethic" role	Personal confidence and belief in self for success; Expertise in other roles transfer to student role; Student role as a "work ethic" role; Past success at another college as supporting future success	Student role as a "work ethic" role; Past success at another college as supporting future success	Personal confidence and belief in self for success; Expertise in other roles transfer to student role; Past success at another college as supporting future success	Expertise in other roles transfer to student role; Past success at another college as supporting future success

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Key Category	New entry - Key themes	Reentry - Significant Gap in enrollment - Key themes	Reentry - Transfer to 4-year more competitive climate - Key themes	Reentry - Participate in similar college climate & reentry adult degree program - Charles College students - Key themes	Reentry - Uniquely structured adult degree program - Allerton College - Key themes
Resolving uneven knowledge and skill background	Valued developmental studies to succeed	Gap in required foundational knowledge	Gap in required foundational knowledge	Gap in required foundational knowledge	Limited awareness of gaps in knowledge and skills
Entry as learning how to learn and study	Learning how to retain exact course content	Learning how to retain exact course content; Learning based in faculty's knowledge structure	Learning based in faculty's knowledge structure; Learning based in practical applications; Learning based in broader conceptual applications	Learning based in faculty's knowledge structure; Learning based in practical applications; Learning based in broader conceptual applications	Learning based in faculty knowledge structures; Learning based in practical applications
INFLUENCES ON THE ADULT STUDENT ROLE					
Paradox of being an older student	Initial discomfort; Discovery of comfort zone	Initial discomfort; Discovery of comfort zone	Initial discomfort; Discovery of comfort zone	No comments on age and college climate	No comments on age and college climate
Adult life influencing student role	Impact of stress and conflict; Enhancement of self	Impact of stress and conflict; Enhancement of self	Impact of stress and conflict; Enhancement of self	Impact of stress and conflict; Enhancement of self	Impact of stress and conflict; Enhancement of self
Age as it influences learning	Aging deteriorates memorization	Aging deteriorates memorization; Aging as a positive influence on learning	Aging as a positive influence on learning	Aging as a positive influence on learning	Aging deteriorates memorization; Aging as a positive influence on learning
Differentiation of disciplines and learning strategies	No comments	Perceived two modes of learning between disciplines	Perceived two modes of learning between disciplines	Perceived two modes of learning between disciplines	No comments
Dichotomy of academic and real world knowledge	Academic knowledge foundation to later real world application	Academic knowledge as reinforcement or illumination of real world knowledge; Critique of non-world applications of knowledge; Immersion into academic knowledge bridging real knowledge	Academic knowledge as reinforcement or illumination of real world knowledge; Immersion into academic knowledge bridging real knowledge	Academic knowledge as reinforcement or illumination of real world knowledge; Critique of non-world applications of knowledge; Immersion into academic knowledge bridging real knowledge	Academic knowledge as reinforcement or illumination of real world knowledge; Critique of non-world applications of knowledge

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Chapter 3

Adult Student Beliefs About Learning in the Classroom and its Relationship to Other Adult Life Roles

INTRODUCTION

Adult undergraduate students in this study believed the classroom was the main stage for the creation and negotiation of meanings for learning, for being a student, and for defining the collegiate experience. This dominance of the classroom experience for adult undergraduates also defined the "shared culture" of the college. However, this culture of place and time for adults was more than a stylized ritual of a classroom experience, more than an expert instructing novice learners in disciplinary knowledge. For these adults, this place and time created unique personal meanings of self in relation to the collegiate learning. In addition, these adults saw learning beyond the classroom walls and collegiate environment. To create and make meaningful learning, these students drew upon a broader community, their own life actions, their past biography, and their connectedness with the world. Because they were embedded in adult roles and actions, they actively made meanings of their collegiate learning experiences and learning through student, work, family, and community citizen roles. They saw the classroom transaction within their total life experiences interwoven between formal and informal knowledge.

Past Literature and Research

As suggested by Vygotsky's activity theory (1978), as well as the related theories of social constructivism, adult students viewed their learning role from life-world actions. In this theoretical foundation, life activities were suggested to be influenced by adult choice and judgement based in constructed personal meaning. Thus, these adult students defined and acted upon learning within the classroom transaction from their life-world context, through the interactions of the adult roles and relationships in the student role, and with continuous reflection upon life meanings as they engaged in undergraduate education (Kasworm, 1990b). Adult undergraduate learning was initially framed by the classroom or collegiate experience; however, adult students usually interpreted and acted on significant learning experiences from their entire social system. As noted in a review of adult undergraduate student research, "adult students are examples of centrifugal growth, of academic growth towards outward roles and experiences" (Kasworm, 1990, p. 366). These adult learners made meaning of the undergraduate experience as they concurrently engaged in student, work, family, and community adult roles. Their development of understanding came through this interactive process. Although adults were physically "taught" in a classroom by a faculty member on a collegiate campus, significant collegiate learnings interdependently occurred between the classroom interaction and the adult student's community of student, work, family, and societal life.

Based in work of Rogoff and Lave (1984) and the more recent work of Lave and Wenger (1991) on everyday and situated cognition and learning, adult students acted on learning from two levels. At one level, the adult student constructed a world oflearning by the rituals and routines of the classroom, lectures, note-taking, papers, examinations, and grades. These cultural artifacts [as defined through Vygotsky] provided socially negotiate and common concepts, experiences, and terminology to describe the nature of the classroom transaction. However, these adult students also spoke to operating at a second level—constructing a world of learning which focused upon the cognitive, affective, and action-outcome knowledge and skills in the adult life context beyond the collegiate classroom. This second level had many variations in its nature of construction and direction. These adults often utilized real world contexts to create understandings and actions of cognitive apprenticeship between the theoretical world of knowledge in the classroom and the practical world of knowledge in adult life. Thus, these adults often suggested making meanings through actions beyond the classroom, the faculty member's ideas, and the text. As noted by Eraut, "ideas become clarified and personalized during use; and have only limited meaning prior to use. The context of use affects the way an idea is understood (Eraut, 1985, p. 117). For these adults, the "context" of their lives, and its relationships to their learning, influenced how and what they learned.

Past research on adult undergraduate learning in the classroom has explored several specific vantage points. These prior studies have looked at the adult's perspective on the nature of beliefs, behaviors, and expectations of adult students and of faculty who teach adult students. This recent research has focused on perceptions of effective teaching (Ross-Gordon, 1991), perceptions of effective instructors (Flannery, 1991; Galerstein & Chandler, 1982), perceptions of teaching and learning from the perspective of both the adult student as well as from the faculty who instruct adult students (Apps, 1981; Chickering, et al., 1981; Marton & Saljo, 1976; Slotnick et al., 1993; Tracy & Schuttenberg, 1986), and perceptions of the classroom social climate (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989). In many of these studies, it has been suggested that adult students value an effective teaching style and positive teacher-student relationships. Further, adult students value a classroom that provides collaborative, interactive involvements. Some authors have focused upon a more dominant student role in the teaching-learning process, while others suggest a more interdependent set of actions between adult students and faculty. A few works have particularly drawn upon Knowles' discussions of andragogy and other beliefs of adult self-directed learning to elaborate on teaching-learning interactions (Candy, 1991; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). These studies and other theoretical works have continued a dialogue regarding the relationship of adult learner autonomy and self-directedness in control and design of the learning as it redefines the often distinctive hierarchical faculty dominance of classroom and academic learning process. Understanding the adult learning interactions between themselves, the college faculty, and the other members of the classroom has represented a highly complex and dynamic set of relationships. With limited past research in this area of adult involvement in learning in undergraduate studies, there are still significant issues to be explored. There is need for continued qualitative investigation of the values, beliefs, and actions of adult students as they engage in learning and action in the undergraduate collegiate setting. This current study continues this line of inquiry.

Overview of Chapter

Because of the complexity, richness, and diversity of beliefs and actions in learning in the adult undergraduate student role, this report has presented discussions of the adult learner-student role in two chapters. This chapter is concerned with key themes of belief and action regarding adult undergraduate perceptions of the classroom learning transaction and their related beliefs and actions concerning academic learning in relation to other life roles. The previous chapter focuses on the entry and socialization beliefs of adult undergraduates and key beliefs which influenced their meaning of the adult student role. These two chapters provide the reader with a broader array of viewpoints, beliefs, and actions surrounding the student role and its major task of making meaning of student role, entry into the collegiate context, student and learner actions with knowledge, as well as the interactions of other life actions.

To aid the reader in understanding the presentation of this research, broad generalized actions and beliefs across most collegiate environments and adult student groups are presented in categories. These categories of meaning present global meaning descriptions offered by most adults in the six institutional collegiate settings. Differential perspectives and beliefs within a category are presented in themes within the three differing institutional/instructional contexts: community colleges; public universities and the adult degree program at a private liberal arts college (Charles); and the uniquely structured adult degree program at a private liberal arts college (Allerton).

Because of the diversity and complexity of adult students and their life experiences among the six institutions, this report will also present subthemes which suggest particularistic beliefs and perspectives. At this more focused level, these subthemes illuminate specialized perspectives and actions of a smaller collection of adult students who acted in differing ways within the theme meaning structure. As will be noted throughout this chapter, these specialized collections of adult students with subthemes usually could not be distinguished and grouped by external descriptors of their status, background, or institutional involvement. Rather, in this chapter these unique subthemes represented particularistic conditions, beliefs, or a cluster of past experiences which shaped the current expression and belief of this specialized adult subgrouping. These unique subthemes are reported in italics in the text of the chapter. To aid the reader, the final Summary section of this chapter presents a table noting these distinguishing characteristics, categories, themes, beliefs, and actions of classroom learning experiences by adult undergraduates.

This current chapter discussion of adult student beliefs about adult learning is presented in two parts. The first examines adult student beliefs of learning in the collegiate classroom. Key categories will include: 1) beliefs about quality collegiate instruction, 2) beliefs about the faculty-student relationship and its influence on classroom learning, 3) beliefs about the nature of the classroom environment, 4) beliefs about the influence of younger student classmates and adult student classmates on learning in the classroom, 5) influences and impacts of cognitive and classroom structures on adult learning, and 6) influence of grades, testing and program structure on studying and learning. In the second part of the chapter, a special examination of the meaning-making connections between academic knowledge and life roles will be explicated.

ADULT STUDENT BELIEFS ABOUT LEARNING IN THE COLLEGIATE CLASSROOM

Beliefs about Quality Collegiate Instruction

Quality of instruction was a key expectation and judgment criteria for adults across all collegiate settings. The key attributes for quality classroom instruction included: quality course organization and well-designed and executed course experiences; quality and knowledgeable faculty instructors; approachable and engaging classroom relationships; size of class as an influence on quality instruction and faculty relationships; and course efficiency and related outcomes.

Course Organization and Syllabus

A predominant view of a quality course for adult undergraduates focused upon thoughtful preparation and excellent organization of content and class process. A quality course was judged by adults, in part, through a defined and delineated sequence of activities and events orchestrated by a faculty member or academic program. They expected faculty to bring the best of their knowledge and systematic organization. They expected a thoughtfully designed learning journey appropriate for the students in that class.

Because these adults valued course organization, one key element of this identified expert learning system, was the *importance and value of a syllabus* for each course. The syllabus was viewed as a most helpful faculty statement revealing thoughtful prior preparation, creating class organization, and providing a roadmap of key expectations on student assignments and assessment testing. Some adults reported that they judged the quality of the instructor and the future value of the course through the syllabus and its presentation of prior planning. A number of students viewed the syllabus and instructor's oral overviews of the course as a cognitive map which allowed them to make better meaning of the course knowledge landmarks and to be prepared to more fully engage in each class session. Many students noted that a syllabus was a reflection of an ideal flow of activities for the class. In reality, each course and instructor had a particular pace; thus they also acknowledged and expected the shifting of stated dates and topics. They understood that the classroom transaction was dynamic. The syllabus provided a beginning structure, with both instructor and class influencing the eventual course actions in relation to earlier designated dates, readings, and discussions in the class.

Most adults strongly valued communicated organization and projected course actions. Because of conflicting time demands between work, family, school, and other responsibilities, these students desired advanced warning of key assignments and other homework time commitments. They wanted to be prepared; they wanted to be able to complete assignments which met faculty-stated timelines; however, they did not usually have the ability to rapidly respond to impromptu class demands. Most students required advance notice and carefully preplanned scheduling for each course for the entire semester. Because of their complex life responsibilities and commitments to school, work, and family, they felt more in control of their ability to handle school with these advanced organizers in courses. "I like to plan. I like to know when my tests are going to fall. I plan everything with school activities and [husband's] job. I need the preplanning to make it work for my life. I've got to preplan each week, and then I can pace myself to study" [Delta].

Adult students in the community college setting and in the adult degree program at Allerton viewed the course organization as paramount to effective learning. There were strong judgements about the value of systematic, organized structures to facilitative learning. Students in the public university setting and in Charles College's adult degree program also reported the value of a well-designed classroom experience. However, in upper-division settings, adults also valued faculty who were more flexible and free-flowing, who offered alternative forms of the learning journey through the course content. They perceived flexible faculty attitudes and actions, as well as unstructured learning experiences as an intriguing and stimulating format. They viewed these non-organized actions to be based upon a philosophically-rich, interactive learning evolution, rather than an external, preplanned criterion structure. Within this group at the upper-division level, they also realized that the syllabus was just a tool to aid students. Many reported that after initial discussion or consultation, they only used the syllabus to keep up with dates for readings and tests.

Qualified, Knowledgeable Faculty Instructors

All adult students expressed a belief in a basic standard by which they judged and valued college instructors. They expected all instructors in college to be qualified, knowledgeable, organized, and competent in teaching the course topic. Adult students found that most faculty instructors met this standard. Some adults reported disappointment and anger with inadequate or unqualified instructors. Unqualified instructors were defined by lack of knowledge and ineffective instructional communication of course topic; by lack of doctoral credentials (including graduate teaching assistants and part-time instructors); and by the lack of currency of knowledge in the subject matter (usually in upper-division courses). In the upper-division courses, particularly in professional studies courses and in the adult degree programs which featured professional studies, a number of students were also critical of faculty instructors who lacked real world experiences in the content and could not discuss applications of the content among real world settings.

This basic standard for quality instructors and instruction was often viewed by adults in the lower-division course work as directly related to the professorial ranking of the faculty member. They believed that students would receive a higher quality of instruction with a higher ranking of faculty. Therefore, these students were more judgmental and critical about assistant professors, instructors, and teaching assistants in university classrooms. In particular, adult students often raised issue with the use of teaching assistants as key instructors in the classroom. This situation was only present at Fremont University and was most often discussed in relation to science and engineering classes. Many adult students who experienced graduate teaching assistants (TA's) assumed that they did not receive the same quality of education. One student who transferred from a regional college campus noted, "Now that I'm here I feel like I got more for my education dollar at X regional college, because the classes were smaller and they were taught by full professors; never had a TA teach a class, even the freshman level class." These students also noted some difficulties with TA's who did not attempt to establish a relationship with adult students. "A lot of times, they'll brush you off. I don't think it's intentional. I think it's just they've got too much to do and some little something that you've got that you want to ask them is not important." Adult students in the sciences and engineering also noted concern at the lack of faculty instruction linked to student understanding. These adults viewed the instructor role in these classes as pivotal in aiding students to make connection and meaning of the course content beyond a straight lecture. They believed that most teaching assistants did not feel comfortable in having class discussions, while faculty would provide in-class assistance through class interactions. Many other adults believed that teaching assistants treated the whole class as though it was a youth-based class. At best, the older students were ignored; at worst, the older students were put down by teaching assistants because of their age and life experiences. Some believed that TA's were intimidated by older students in the classroom. "They feel intimidated and they feel resentful in some respects." Not all adults who experienced teaching assistants as the main course instructor were negative; some reported excellent instruction by teaching assistants who were doctoral candidates at Fremont.

Beyond the basic standard of good instructional qualities, adult students had a second and higher standard for quality instructors and instruction. This higher standard reflected *both selected personal characteristics and adult-oriented attitudes of faculty instructors.* This advanced standard of quality focused upon enthusiasm, motivating interactions, skillful instruction, collegiality, and a commitment to helping adult students learn the key content and process skills of the course. Adult students valued faculty who were receptive to their current life circumstances and time-boundedness of their learning process. They also valued faculty who offered a comfortable and student-engaging learning environment in the classroom. "I like those teachers that really hold your interest, that make the subject come alive. That are animated, that are obviously into it, they care. Those teachers that have the magic, whatever it is to grab people's imagination" [Fremont]. This standard also focused upon faculty who aided student development of meaning and comprehension of the course content. "[The faculty should] explain the material, to bring it to you alive. I mean not just out of the book. To connect the theory with practice and explain and try to make the individual student understand the material in the best way possible" [Delta].

Given these basic and advanced levels of expectations about faculty instructors, most adult students in the various settings were understanding and often accepting of the variable quality of instruction. They could accept a classroom experience that met the first level of minimum instructional quality. They also noted the joy of experiencing a preferred second level of quality instruction. However, there were times when inadequate or inferior instruction was part of their collegiate course experiences. Because these adults held high expectations for the quality of teaching, they were very disappointed with instructors who did not do their very best to create a valued learning experience. At the public university, adult students expressed anger regarding burned-out faculty who were just filling in the time, who were not committed to the class, to the students, and to the learning process. Students in the community college and in the adult degree programs expressed anger about faculty instructors who appeared to be uncommitted and uninvolved in the instructional process. These students most often expressed a dislike for instructors who just read from the text, or for part-time faculty who were judged to be in the classroom for extra income and were uncommitted to the student learning process.

Classroom Relationships

Good instruction was more than well-organized content and knowledgeable faculty. Most adult students believed that good instruction also entailed an approachable, accessible classroom relationship. This in-class relationship often was believed to aid in developing student competency as a learner, to aid the student to gain a better understanding of self as learner, as well as to model undergraduate specialized knowledge and inquiry. Those faculty and fellow student colleagues who maintained a distance or a detachment from the adult students were viewed as hindering a positive class climate and an effective student learning process.

This engaging class relationship was a sign of respect and worth of adult students in undergraduate classrooms. Adult students believed that faculty and other students who valued them would feel more at ease and therefore be able to create a relaxed classroom relationship with adult students. For example, adult students placed high value upon faculty members who demonstrated personal interest and helpfulness in the classroom. However, these actions of interest and helpfulness in the class relationship were differentially judged from student to student, from class to class, and from varied perspectives on academic discipline and format of instruction. Most adult students valued faculty members who called them by name. "The most impressive thing to me is a professor who calls people by name and makes a point of knowing their name and inter-relating with these people in class." Others valued personal interactions in the class, and a few valued out-of-class dialogue with faculty focused upon both class activities, as well as themselves as accomplished and committed adult student learners. Some students believed that establishing faculty-student relationships was imperative for future success in specific courses. As noted by one student at a public university,

> They [the faculty] are the ones that will lead the class. They are the ones that you have to develop some kind of a bond with. You have to adjust to them; they certainly don't have to adjust to you. I think that the professor is someone that is going to convey what they want you to learn. And it is up to you to grasp it, to try and understand that professor, because they are all different, they are all human beings and they are all different. [Delta]

As suggested by the above quote, many students believed there was a necessity to create a faculty-student relationship in order to ascertain these faculty's expectations and bases for future judgements of student performance. Quality instruction and learning outcomes were judged by adult students in part to come from a favorable faculty-student classroom relationship.

Relationships with fellow students were also differentially reflected in student belief systems. Many adult students felt self-confident and autonomous and thus created connections with students. Others waited for fellow students to create initial interactions and to present an openness to their presence. Many valued class formats which created and supported friendly and helpful student interactions.

Size of Class Influence in Quality Instruction and its Perceived Impact

Quality instruction as viewed by students at four-year institutions (public universities and private liberal arts colleges with adult degree programs) was judged by the size of the classes. Size of a class and the quality of instruction were believed to be inversely related—the larger the size of the class, the lesser the quality of instruction for learning. At Fremont University, several students believed that very large classes (100 to 300 students) were problematic for their learning. "You're just in there—it's almost an attitude thing....and my experience especially in the big classes—that kids just don't go to class." These students also believed that faculty could not create an interactive learning community when they were in large classrooms designed for straight lecture sessions. Many students reported holding back on questions or being directly told by faculty not to ask questions during class time in large class sections. In essence, these students often felt like it was a one-way monologue to a faceless and voiceless crowd.

Concerns for large classes and their influence on quality instruction were not raised by adults in community colleges, adult degree programs in private liberal arts colleges, or adults enrolled in Delta University. In contrast, adult students in these collegiate settings spoke to the special value of a small class. Particularly, students at the adult degree programs praised their learning experiences because of the more intimate and personal interactions of a class of 15 to 25 students. Often their value of the smaller classroom environment focused as much upon the students' ease of accessing each other as it did upon accessing the faculty member. "The class is small enough that you know everybody, you know where they work. Everybody extends his phone number, so you can call at work or at home." These students felt that the size and interactions of the small classes created a bonding beyond the classroom and allowed the development of privileged access of their fellow students outside of the classroom.

Efficiency of Course Presentation and Expected Outcomes

In addition to these general judgements of quality courses and instructors, students in the accelerated adult degree program at Allerton also raised several unique concerns about course organization, quality of instruction, and time commitments. They *valued efficiency in the organization, presentation, and assigned student tasks by the instructors.* In essence, they expected the courses to clearly communicate specific demands upon students' time for the entire semester, and that those demands be reasonable for working adults. They also valued instructors who had eliminated the nonessential information and activities and had chosen to hit the key points. They detested time-wasters, particularly in reading or work assignments. This theme of efficiency within courses was unique to Allerton and its accelerated program. Although adult students in other contexts noted concern about the length of time to complete courses, they were more concerned about alternatives to courses to speed up their completion of degree requirements rather than a specific focus with a compressed class content and limited time parameters.

Summary of Beliefs about Quality Collegiate Instruction

Adult undergraduates suggested five central values for judging quality of instruction. The first element was **quality course organization and well-designed and executed course experiences.** Systematic, organized instruction was valued by upper-division students; they also noted the value of flexible, organic and more experientially based processes of instruction. The second element was **quality and knowledgeable faculty instructors**, reflecting beliefs about competent, valued faculty. There was an added preference for faculty who were enthusiastic, committed, and personable. Within this belief system about quality instructors, there were specific concerns about teaching assistants in the public university setting, as well as uncommitted and burned-out faculty across all settings. **Classroom relationships** which were psychologically inclusive of adult students and provided meaningful connections between adult students, faculty, and other class members were viewed as an important third element of a quality course experience. From differing perspectives, the fourth element, **size of class,** was judged to be an influence on quality instruction and faculty-student relationships. Adults in public universities were critical about large classes, while a number of other adults in other settings reported valuing smaller, seminar style class experiences. And a final element of quality course instruction was specific to Allerton College adult students. They valued **efficiency and compression of course instruction and outcomes**.

Beliefs about the Faculty and their Influence on the Classroom Learning Process

Faculty held a key role in the adult undergraduate learning journey. In particular, adult-student reported key beliefs included: 1) respect and helpfulness as pivotal in faculty-student learning relationships, 2) varied beliefs and judgements about the faculty role in relation to the adult student role, 3) special faculty actions towards adult students, and 4) creation of a connected relationship with faculty.

Most adult students presumed that the most important person in their academic world was the faculty member. This predominant belief of the importance of the faculty instructor was represented through several perspectives. More often this belief was a dominant expectation of lower-division adult students. They believed that faculty should demonstrate respect and support for adult students as they participated in academic learning. If this respect was not present in the classroom, adult students often questioned their own worth and abilities as students. To not be respected meant to them that they were potentially inferior to the college environment. In addition, most adults in lower-division courses valued, if not expected, faculty to be helpful and supportive in their efforts to succeed in a collegiate world. They presumed that only with faculty support and help could they be successful as college students. Adults in upper-division course work did not usually judge faculty to have controlling power over their lives and actions as students; nor did they assume that faculty helpfulness created their own classroom success. However, students with academic difficulties and also women often expressed greater concerns about the quality of support and helpfulness with in-class faculty relationships. Adult students in the upper-level viewed support and helpfulness as a sign of respect of their own status in adult life. They viewed faculty as facilitating their own efficacy in the classroom and their learning experiences framed by the course.

Respect and Helpfulness as a Pivotal Element in Faculty-Student Learning Relationships

Most adults believed that effective and valued faculty members demonstrated respect, personal interest, and helpfulness to adult students. In particular they valued faculty actions which revealed a concern for a student's personal dignity and success. Few adults encountered arrogant or intimidating faculty; but when they did, these adults were disappointed and, if possible, avoided them.

Adults noted valuing faculty who demonstrated an attitude and action of support and helpfulness towards adults. These beliefs about support and helpfulness by faculty varied among groupings of adult students. Adult students, particularly in the community college setting, believed that a good instructor should purposefully create a helping and supportive relationship. For these adults, part of that helpful relationship focused directly upon the personhood of the student Further, the actions of helpfulness also focused upon faculty who created class activities for meaningful retention and understanding of course content for good grades. As noted by one Bayville student, "I had a wonderful experience with instructors, loving caring instructors that really helped. They didn't just give you the material and say 'Hey, learn this.' They helped you to be, to feel good about yourself." Many students appreciated faculty who showed personal recognition and interest in their sense of self, their lives, and their academic progress. As reported by one Elmwood student,

> There are some teachers—who continually ask about my program, how am I doing and that sort of thing. Every time they see me they want to know what I'm going to be doing next. They show a real interest in my academic welfare and are curious. And I think that's real neat. It makes you feel good...because it's unsolicited.

This focus on faculty helpfulness in the community college context included the *faculty attributes of coaching and encouragement.* "All the instructors encourage the students to be prepared for the next day and they ask you questions involving the material. They just encourage you to participate. They encourage you to study." Many also viewed teachers as taking on a more proactive role to support students' involvement, particularly with those adult students who were passive and quiet in class. Instructors would challenge them, by "pulling out the material" from students, helping them realize that they did "know the materials." Other students referred to instructors who helped by "pushing them," telling them that they could do the work and could be successful in a course or in the college. One adult praised a community college instructor, commenting, "She really gave me the courage to think that I could do it." Instructors also provided a safe environment when they offered "extra chances" in course work. As suggested by an Elmwood student, "They're really interested in educating you so...They'll work with you and you can make it. They've given me a lot of chances, you know."

There was another type of belief about faculty helpfulness described by adult students. Adult students at the adult degree programs and at the public universities suggested that helpfulness was the *openness of the faculty member to be supportive and be facilitative of adult students and their learning.* This belief represented a faculty member's communication of openness in the classroom and respectfulness of the potency and diversity of adult experiences. Regardless of the institutional setting, adult students desired faculty who respected them, gave them feedback about their understanding of the content, and suggested resources to resolve difficulty due to either an inadequate background or an inability to grasp current content. Thus, these students often used the word "helpful" to describe a broad belief about faculty caring, respect, and support for adult students.

Beliefs about the Faculty Role in Relation to the Adult Student Role

Beyond general beliefs about faculty helpfulness and support, there were differentiated perceptions about the faculty-adult student relationships. Four differing beliefs about this relationship between faculty and adult students were voiced: 1) a god-like and detached relationship to the faculty; 2) an expert-novice relationship to the faculty member; 3) a quasi-peer relationship with faculty; and 4) a partnership between adult students and faculty members. The one exception to these common belief systems was at Allerton College. Because of the unique structure of this adult degree program, Allerton employed part-time practitioner instructors and featured an interactive class format between facilitator and students, as well as a focus on student learning groups and project team activities. These students did not speak to a relationship of the faculty member to the adult student in the classroom learning experience. Beliefs about student and faculty relationships were defined by adult students as created in the classroom and to be largely influenced by faculty attitudes and behaviors. However, in examining these four beliefs, it is evident that the adult students' constructed beliefs reflected other elements which had a significant influence on defining those relationships.

Perspectives on Student-Faculty Relationships: Belief in Faculty as God-like Individuals

Most new entry adult undergraduates in the community college and often new entry students in the public university viewed faculty members as god-like individuals. These students saw the faculty member as the powerful, all knowing creator and actor in the learning process. The faculty instructor directed and evaluated the important knowledge and learning in the classroom. These students were very intimidated and in awe of the instructor. They assumed that the faculty member was perfect and they, as students, were flawed. Thus, they feared being asked to respond to questions and to be evaluated on tests and papers. They assumed that they could not measure up to the high-level expectations of the faculty. In an effort to conform to these presumed high standards by this superior instructor, adult students attempted to pay undivided attention to both the oral messages and subtle behavioral cues of the classroom relationship with the instructor. This relationship was not necessarily one which required verbal faculty monologue during a class; however, this belief did create an expectation of a highly authoritative and dutiful relationship between student and faculty member. Over time these adults reported establishing a mutually-understood relationship between themselves and the faculty member. In particular, they established the respect of the faculty member. These adults suggested that over time in the class activities, they came to know how to act as students. They believed that desired student actions were constructed through faculty discussions of expectations for student actions and performance, through both their raising and answering of questions, through the faculty's knowing looks and nods at specific class members, as well as through an occasional out-of-class interaction.

Perspective on Student-Faculty Relationships: Faculty Member as Accessible Experts

Many of the adult students viewed faculty members as experts who were personable and accessible. This viewpoint also came later to new students who held the earlier belief of the superior and distance qualities of the instructor. With time and interactions, these new entry adults came to a different understanding of the faculty member, as well as the role between the faculty members and adult students. At this point, faculty were no longer god-like, distant, and inaccessible.

This belief of a faculty-student relationship was described by most recent reentry adults and a subset of continuing adult students in community colleges, public universities, and the adult degree program at Charles College. They believed that faculty were experts who could also be personable, accessible, and collegial with adult students.

> I tended [in the past] to view all instructors as on a pedestal—really up there and really different..and just unreachable...And I found now that they're more like people and they have families and they have a lot of things going on too. I got to know her [a professor] and it was really helpful that way ..I didn't think I was stupid when I asked questions or just in the course of conversation, it seemed like it was more a friend trying to help than this person was unreachable ...Then I really started to relax and realize they're here to help instead of make you feel, you know, like you're stupid. [Delta]

Within this belief system, some adult students also noted an additional feature, that of a different student-faculty relationship for adult students in contrast to younger students. These students believed that they were given preferential treatment in comparison to younger students. They suggested that faculty shared a more respectful, differential attitude towards adult students in the class. "I think they treat them [adult students] with considerable deference...I think they're inclined to be more courteous, because they're looking at someone that's within their cohort or older" [Bayville]. One Elmwood student, who was in her early thirties suggested, "It seems that the people that are older than me that are in the class really kind of click with the teachers and they have a relationship inside the classroom." Students with this comparative belief represented community college students with several semesters of previous enrollment and some reentry adult students in public universities.

Perspectives on Student-Faculty Felationships: Quasi-peer Relationship Between Faculty and Adult Students

Faculty student relationships characterized as quasi-peer relationships were often voiced by a particular subgrouping of adult students. These students usually were enrolled in behavioral sciences, humanities, and professional studies programs; were more often in upper division course work; had been enrolled in course work for some length of time; and were predominantly in the public universities and adult degree programs. As noted by one Delta student,

> I think we're treated as more like peers than a student/teacher role...Some of these younger people don't have a lot of that [interpersonal skills/self-confidence]. They kind of go in with their mind set that this is a superior person standing up in front; and I must bow and kneel or whatever and do these things that students are supposed to do.

Most students had difficulty defining this relationship which was neither superior/subordinate nor a relationship of equals. An adult degree student at Charles College commented about this relationship,

> A sense of respect, a sense of understanding the time contrast, an admiration. You're not necessarily treated as a contemporary. But it's an adult communicating with another adult, instead of an adult communicating with someone in their late teens or early twenties. And there's just a difference with the dialogue that develops from that [relationship].

Perspectives of Student-Faculty Relationships: Partnership Between Faculty and Students

A small subgroup of adult students believed that there should be an equal partnership or peer relationship between faculty and adult students. They suggested this partnership was based upon mutual but differing expertise or upon a contractual relationship of producer/evaluator and consumer/performer. These adult believed they had a significant knowledge of the world and had been successful in another sphere of adult accomplishments. Therefore, the relationship between the adult and the faculty member would be between two experts from different fields. This partnership would reflect acknowledgement and sharing of differing expertise.

Other students in this group believed there was a contractual partnership. Within this group, adult students participated in undergraduate work for a credential. They believed they hired and paid faculty to provide these services. Based in this consumer-oriented belief system, adults framed the relationship with faculty as a specific contractual duty in which each was required to perform specific expected tasks. Often they characterized faculty as hired providers of services and the evaluators of their student performance. For example, one student at a community college noted, "I pay that person to teach me to learn, you know, like chemistry...I'm employing them more or less, they are here to serve me. But by the same token, I have a standard that I have to live up to more or less. The teacher and the students, to me, are equals" [Bayville]. This belief regarding the partnership relationship was held by some adult students at each of the institutional settings in the study.

Special Faculty Actions Towards Adult Students

In addition to global beliefs and expectations of faculty relationships to students in the classroom, adult students also reported three types of constructed beliefs and understandings of faculty actions in a class. One key belief concerned faculty expectations for higher performance by adult students. Another constructed belief concerned faculty valuing adult work and life experiences in relation to the classroom experience. Lastly, some adults spoke to their beliefs about negative faculty behavior and specifically arrogant faculty actions.

Faculty-held Higher Expectations for Adult Students

Many adults believed that *faculty expected more of adult students.* This belief was raised by a subset of students in the public university setting, when they compared their relationship with the faculty instructor to that of the younger student's relationship to the same faculty member.

> Sometimes we're expected to do more. I mean in some ways since you are an adult and you have been exposed to things, you're expected to do more—like in writing classes or English classes and stuff...My instructor said, 'I'm going to expect a whole lot more out of you than I do these kids—for the fact that you've experienced more and you should be able to tell those experiences'..And I felt I was pushed more than the kids were in some respects. [Delta]

Students at the community college believed that faculty expected adult students to have certain background knowledge.

> I think that they expect more out of an older student than they do out of younger students. It's like an older student is supposed to already know all. I've had teachers that have said, 'Well, you know this'. And I have learned to say, 'No I don't,' or 'Yes, I do.' And I've learned how to [speak up]. [Bayville]

These adults suggested that faculty would not 'spoon feed' them like they would younger students. "We're expected to do a lot more independent work. We're don't get handed very much here on a platter. You are expected to clarify what you don't understand and ask questions, otherwise it is assumed you are prepared. You're ready and you know it" [Fremont].

Linked to these higher expectations, adult students suggested that faculty treated them as responsible adults. Often adult students suggested that a segment of younger students acted irresponsibly, immaturely, and in an undisciplined fashion. Thus, these adult students respected the adult construct of responsible, mature and disciplined student attitudes and behaviors. Because of these faculty beliefs about adult students, there was a perception that faculty treatment of adult students also reflected *a more flexible and differentiated faculty attitude about adult student behaviors and participation.*

> I was nervous, but the professors, they understood that we were adults coming back and that we weren't 17 or 18 years old. They didn't treat us as 17 or 18 years old; they treated us as adults with jobs and families and all that goes along with being 35 plus. [Delta]

> I think most professors here at Charles treat night-time adult students with some type of respect—They're [professors] more interested in what we [adult students] have to say as far as making a point. They also treat us different as far as attendance; they're more flexible with us with attendance.

Many adult students felt that faculty valued them as learners, and expected more from them because adults were more committed to the learning experience. They believed that *faculty acted in certain ways towards adult students because of this adult commitment and appreciation of the learning/teaching process.*

> I think the faculty sees it [student valuing the faculty member]. And I think that they feel appreciated by me paying attention, taking it seriously, being

> interested, being open to what they have to teach me. And I think it is very rewarding for a teacher too. It's reciprocal. [Delta]

These adult students believed that they were appreciated by faculty because of their maturity, respect, special commitment and dedication to learning, as well as their valuing of the faculty effort. Many students noted that faculty had provided oral compliments on these valued characteristics. For example, in a conversation with an adult student, a faculty member noted, "It's a pleasure having non-traditional students in the class because they tend to be generally better students and they tend to be generally more involved" [Delta]. Most suggested that the faculty members showed them respect. "If they get to know you and they know you're older, I think they show you —some show you a little more respect. I had one that said he admired me for going back to school and working hard" [Fremont].

Faculty Who Valued Life and Work Experiences of Adult Students

Many of the *upper-division adult students believed that faculty members valued adult work experiences.* This valuing was demonstrated most often by faculty integrating adult life and work experiences in their presentation and discussion. By both providing personal life and work examples and soliciting adult student examples, faculty used these perspectives to elaborate and illuminate classroom concepts and applications. Adult students viewed these actions of course integration and connection between life experiences and academic knowledge as a special bond between faculty and adult students. "Some of the professors know that you've been in the real world situation and they value your opinion on things or they want you to relate experiences on what's happened to you, and so that makes you feel good."

By the same token, many adults, particularly in professional schools or related courses, believed that *faculty who had experienced a work environment and had previously applied content knowledge in work settings demonstrated a better grasp of the material.* These faculty could provide a better contextualized understanding of the material. This theme was dominant among adult students from the Allerton College adult degree program.

> The instructors—many of them were managers themselves in their own companies. They could share the experiences that they had with their professions, in addition to their teaching experiences...And I think that added to it. They offered a lot more besides what we just could get from the text book.

Because Allerton offered an academic program taught by practitioner instructors, this expectation appeared to be embedded within the course structure. Students viewed the practitioner faculty as being housed in the work site, along with them. Thus, they believed that the practitioner instructors screened out irrelevant information and only focused upon the important points related to work life and passing the course expectations. Typically, these students assumed that they were learning material that would have direct translation to their work. They saw this faculty-student bonding in relation to the common experiences of their daily action in a work setting beyond the classroom.

In the second adult degree program, Charles College, this theme of faculty with practitioner experiences was also noted as valuable. However, because the program provided most course instruction by full-time faculty, these adult students were more selective in commenting about the faculty role using adult experiences within the instructional process. At this site, there was a mix of faculty who taught full time in both day-time young adult classes, as well as in the evening program for adults. In addition, there were also a number of practitioners who taught evening courses. As noted by the following statement, a subgroup of adults who were in business-related majors did value adjunct practitioner faculty.

> The really neat thing about this school—the professors have other experience, they're not just academia. They've been out in the world. I mean, they actually have experiences to relate to you about...how this relates to what they used to do and what they're doing now and it's really great. And if it spills over—for people who haven't been in the work force—that's the best thing. [Charles]

These different student perspectives between Allerton and Charles adult students suggest both an expectation at entry, as well as a constructed meaning of the relationship between faculty actions, significance of academic and life knowledge, and academic program structures. The Allerton academic program was structured on and valued practitioner faculty being embedded within the work practice knowledge world. Thus, adult students judged faculty as relevant, credible, and focused upon the issues of application in the day-to-day world of business management. In contrast, the Charles program was a liberal arts degree program with a major in business-related areas. Fewer adult students commented about the value of faculty who also had practitioner experiences. Although many students noted the special insights and perspectives offered by the faculty who had known and applied the knowledge to the work world setting, they also reported a broader range of valued faculty characteristics, including the diversity of the faculty across liberal arts and professional course work. In addition, these adult students at Charles valued faculty who would draw upon student work and personal experiences in the context of the subject matter, as well as draw upon work experiences. For Charles students, it was not the dominance of direct content applications into the professional work world they valued. Rather they held more valued judgements of faculty-created linkages between their known world of experiences and the current conceptual content. They looked at a more theoretical and more broadly framed understanding between content and experiences. Many suggested valuing the multiple perspectives created by a liberal arts and a professional studies-business curriculum, of the interrelationship and value of both the academic liberal-arts orientation, as well as the professional work application orientation.

Faculty Who Presented Negative Class Relationships

While students described numerous supportive faculty actions, there were also a portion of faculty-student relationships framed by *intimidating and de-*

meaning faculty behavior. In particular, adult students suggested that often younger students, and sometimes adult students, felt intimidated by the faculty. These adults often saw faculty acting in a perceived power and ego relationships with students. All of the students who reported intimidating faculty behavior seriously questioned this faculty attitude. "Teachers, professors, should not let their education take them away to where they're holier than thou, and they're holding themselves in high esteem...I don't appreciate [teachers being condescending]." A community college student reported, "I had an instructor last fall who talked down to everyone...just like we were seventh graders" [Bayville]. Students at Fremont University were more vocal about arrogant faculty behavior. These students encountered a few condescending faculty who talked down to the students, belittled students during class questioning, or ridiculed students lacking specific kinds of background knowledge. Most students suggested the following belief system: "If they're a good instructor, they're not going to make you feel [like or be called] an idiot." Some adult students attempted to intervene to change the perceived negative faculty actions. For example, one student reported attempting to talk to the faculty about her difficulties in the initial first class session,

> The classes were full and this was what was left...I couldn't drop it. And the man intimidated me so much. I felt like a total idiot...So after that, I thought about it. I said, "I'm going back in there again. I've got to at least let him know."...Maybe professors need a human relations class. [Delta]

Most believed that demeaning actions demonstrated faculty insensitivity, ignorance, and sometimes lack of knowledge competency in the classroom. Adult students believed that this behavior was antithetical to supportive learning based in mutual respect and collaborative involvement in the class. There were also adult students who created different explanations for arrogant and intimidating behavior of faculty on the basis of different knowledge levels between the student and the faculty member. As suggested by one Fremont student,

> An instructor will be so knowledgeable, so educated that they can't bring themselves down to the students' level. But they have a hard time relating to the students that are struggling. They get frustrated easily and they'll just like—"Don't you see it? It's right there!"—And sometimes that gets frustrating...sometimes you have to be assertive and say, "Well, look I'm not getting it. I feel that you're up here, I'm down here and you're not wanting to come down to my level. You're wanting me to come up to you and I can't get there until someone brings me up to it."

Faculty-Student Connected Relationship

Connected Relationships Created in the Classroom

Previous literature regarding faculty-student relationships often suggest that the most effective student outcomes are created through out-of-class faculty interactions. The literature suggests that personal, meaningful exchanges in co-curricular activities between faculty and students have significant potency in shaping the college student experience. However, in the development of adult student-faculty relationships, most adults believed that a *personal relationship was established within the classroom.* Many of these adults suggested that a trust relationship between adult students and faculty was created over time through class interactions; through adult student and faculty exchanges about class assignments, papers and tests; as well as adult student demonstrations of valuing faculty and the teaching/learning environment in the classroom.

> They trust us more—because they know that we're there for real learning. They know we're there for a purpose and we're not there just because of mom and dad, older brothers or sisters. We're there really for business. It's a job for us. We're going to get the job done...it's an attitude of respect for each other." [Delta]

Adult students believed they had a different personal relationship to faculty in comparison with younger students.

> I find I'm at an advantage because of my age; the teacher takes me more seriously than the rest; I just say that because I feel, I experience that somehow. If I have an excuse not to come to class, which is extremely rare, it is absolutely accepted. Whereas with [younger] students often in the course, they goof off or they had a party and the next morning they come in late. Oh that's different [the instructor would not accept their excuse]. So I think for me, if I had anything to explain, I would be taken very seriously. [Elmwood]

Part of this connected relationship for adults was being recognized and personally known by the instructor. These adults believed that valued faculty knew them as individuals with many life roles, as well as a student filling a seat in a classroom. Also some suggested that they had special interactions regarding their progress in college with faculty. As reported by one Fremont University student,

> One of my calculus instructors actually noticed that I had to miss one semester because of my work load. And the next semester I showed up in another one of his classes. I happened to have the same instructor and he said, "You know, I'm glad to see you're back." ...They may treat you more—admiring you more for coming to class and knowing what kind of sacrifices you're having to make.

Thus, for adult students the base of the faculty-adult student relationship occurred within the classroom. The basis of this relationship was constructed through faculty actions towards adult students in creating the structure and functioning of the class and through adult student constructing actions and beliefs in this evolving connected relationship with faculty.

Concern for Equity or Favoritism in Faculty-Adult Student Relationships

The personalized relationship between adult students and faculty sometimes represented specific issues of equality and equity in the classroom. Some community college students believed that in varying subtle and clearly visible ways, instructors gave preference to adult students. "I catch the teachers' eye more. I don't know particularly why, other than that I'm older; and if I have something to say, they listen. There's a difference." On the other hand, many students reported that the faculty did value adult students, but believed that adult students were not given preferential treatment. Rather the adult student's maturity and commitment to learning made the difference for them in the classroom and in their relationship with the faculty member. Many adult students had observed these differences and often voiced their understanding of faculty equity as opposed to favoritism influencing actions toward adult students. As noted by one student,

> I think they tend to treat the student by the way the student produces...I've heard the comment many times from faculty saying that you are older, I know you will get it done...But I think the bottom-line is—I don't think I get a better grade or worse grade, or I don't think I am handled any differently than anyone else is. [Fremont]

Adult students often reported that faculty made requests of adults to provide special assistance in the class learning process. For example, many noted being designated as discussion leaders, being requested to share their notes with international students in the class, or being called upon to aid the class in understanding a particular point. These adults viewed these assignments and requests as another demonstration of that connected, trust relationship between the adult student and the faculty member. Or as another adult student suggested, "So I do think that overall the professors have appreciated having adult students in the class, because like I said we do [give] feedback—I mean we're not afraid to voice our opinions and ask questions" [Delta]. These students believed that faculty valued adults because they communicated authoritative content information and created an interaction of ideas within the class. Unlike the more passive young adult students, most adult students were not afraid to present their ideas, opinions, and engage in the substance of the course. As an adult community college student suggested, "They respect me, they remember me" [Bayville]. These adult students believed that they were more successful and had this connected relationship with faculty because they were known and visible to faculty (in contrast to younger students, who were often judged by adult students to more likely be invisible, passive, and unknown to faculty.) Thus, most adults believed they were valued and trusted in a connected relationship with faculty. This relationship was judged to provide more lenient and flexible standards and expectations.

Necessity of a Personalized Relationship with Faculty

Although individual students sometimes noted a more personal need for a closer, more connected relationship with a faculty member, most students in this study did not suggest the necessity of this personal relationship for their future student success. However, adult students at Delta University shared a common belief in the necessity of a more specific, personalized relationship with faculty. They believed they could only be successful as students if they were personally known and valued by faculty members. Often these students at Delta reported actively creating purposeful interactions with faculty after class and making out-of-class personal contacts with the faculty member. As examples of Delta student perspectives,

> If they [professors] get to know you and they know you're older, I think they show you a little more respect...With most of my professors I usually go to see them in their office once and usually I have to ask questions...Some of them will give you a hard nose in class, but when you get a chance to talk to them, they're not as bad as they seem.
>
> I try to get a one-to-one relationship with my instructors. Because of my age and the experience of life itself, I feel that we are consenting adults who can speak openly without fear of me intimidating you or you intimidating me...We are mature adults, we are old adults in a sense, because the age factor is there. So communication is a little easier too...If I have a question I will come into their office and talk to them. On the other hand, once my questions are answered, I feel that there's the time to really talk nonschool things, nonacademic things...Tell them that I'm a nontraditional student, 34 years old, a little bit of my life history. Then after I get that out, they seem to share a little bit out of their own lives, their own experiences. And then there is not that separation between student/teacher...but almost a relationship...I feel more comfortable in class after I really get to know them.

These adult students at Delta suggested a feeling of a normative classroom distancing of the faculty to in-class students. Most spoke to specific strategies to create a more one-to-one relationship outside of class, and its potential influence in modifying this distancing and the related neutrality or coldness of faculty towards students. Often, they believed their additional efforts to create an out-of-class interaction with faculty helped them feel more comfortable in the classroom. They believed it created the desired personal connected relationship and also aided them in future studying for faculty-constructed tests or the development of faculty-judged essays. Students at the other sites did not voice this same concern or set of actions as a common need to create a connected relationship beyond the classroom to influence their in-class experiences.

Faculty Relationship Based on an Understanding of Adult Lives

Often adult students believed that a *connected faculty-adult student relationship also represented an understanding of adult lives.* A valued professor/ instructor had a particular empathy for adult students and their special life circumstances. As noted by one Elmwood student, "Like the professor I have now, she tried to...put herself in the students' position and make it easier. And she [understood] what it must feel like [being an adult student]." These adults believed that part of the connected trust relationship between a faculty member and an adult student reflected special understandings when adult life circumstances interfered with class assignments, deadlines, or expectations. These adults believed that faculty should understand their life responsibilities and demands. This belief also meant that in difficult times of competing demands, adults valued faculty who made appropriate exceptions to the class standards and norms (for example, permission to retake a test when it conflicted with required business trip). These students appreciated and valued this special understanding that was different from traditional classroom expectations. However, faculty-created exceptions also posed concern for students. They wanted to be understood within their broader life role commitments; yet they feared that by these differences and a negotiated different involvement in the class, they might not be viewed as serious, committed students. One adult student at Fremont noted,

> I do believe they give us a little extra break, and I don't mind that —to a certain extent. I need it, I need that extra compassion, or that extra little break; but at the same time, I want the education. I want the knowledge. So I'm always fighting that fine line between the two: making sure that they know that I want to learn. Don't give me a grade. I don't want you to give me a grade. If I didn't earn it, I don't want it.

Summary of Beliefs about the Faculty Relationship and its Influence on the Classroom Learning Process

Adult students expressed a number of key beliefs about the importance of a faculty-student relationship. One key belief focused upon respect and helpfulness of faculty as a valued element in the faculty-student relationship. There were also key beliefs about **the faculty role in relation to the student role**. Adult students suggested four different perspectives about the faculty in their relationship to adult students. These alternative perspectives looked at faculty as 1) a god-like entity, 2) an accessible expert, 3) a quasi-peer relationship, and 4) a partnership relationship with adult students in the teaching-learning process. Another key belief focused upon **special faculty actions towards adult students** including the impact of special faculty expectations for higher levels of performance from adult students, the faculty valuing of work and life experiences of adult students, and the negative impact of intimidating and arrogant faculty. Many students suggested a key belief concerning the **creation of a connected faculty-adult student relationship.** These adult students believed that this special relationship was created within the classroom, noting concerns for equity and favoritism by faculty towards adults. These adults suggested that another part of the connected relationship was based in faculty understanding adult lives. Lastly, for adult students at Delta, they reported a dominant belief for creating a connected relationship to faculty with out-of-class interactions to enhance their adult success. Students at the other institutional sites did not report this perception or needed actions to create an out-of-class interaction to aid their connectedness to faculty or their success in the classroom.

Beliefs About the Nature of the Classroom Environment

Beyond the importance of a faculty-connected relationship, adult students valued specific qualities in a classroom environment and a classroom transaction. These key qualities reflected adult student beliefs for: 1) interactive class transactions,

2) supportive classroom environment, and 3) specific rituals and routines which supported classroom transactions.

Learning Is Based in Interactive Class Transactions

Active Class Involvement

Most adult students believed that effective learning in the classroom required active participation. Their notions of active participation, however, did not necessarily mean outward verbal engagements, varied student-centered instructional activities, or a dominant class leadership role. Many adults described their personal active involvement as a *committed, attentive presence in the classroom and an active cognitive interaction with the ideas of the instructor's lecture.* However, when asked to describe their observations of adult student class participation, many would report adult students, as well as themselves, initiating class discussions, raising questions, and being interactive within the class experience. "I would be more apt to ask a question than perhaps...well, I think there's a trend here...I think the older students are less inhibited. They're more willing to ask questions or to try to elicit more information than...somebody who's younger" [Elmwood]. A number of students felt that they informally acted as a classroom spokesperson or acted as an intermediary between the class and the faculty, to provide a helpful learning experience, such as eliciting instructor clarification of a point. They saw this role as helpful to the class, because they perceived younger students as not having sufficient courage to raise questions. Many adult students saw themselves as initiators of classroom conversations, of "breaking the ice" to aid faculty who desired student feedback and interaction. As observed by one adult student, "The teacher says, 'Does anyone have anything that they'd like to ask or could add?' And there's just dead silence in the room. And it's usually the older students that are putting forth all this information or asking the questions" [Delta].

Adult students valued active mental and verbal participation. They believed that active participation aided both themselves, as well as their fellow classmates and the faculty instructor. As suggested by an Elmwood student,

> You can come up with ideas yourself, but if you don't have somebody to bounce things off of—I mean it [understanding of knowledge] really doesn't grow that much and expand. And it's nice to be able to have somebody else's input, because they can say one thing and you will see it from a whole different direction. So that's helpful.

Classroom participation was an important vehicle that enabled adults to link current learning with their own life experiences. Often these adults would speak to discussions between faculty and students which involved either examples or applications of class concepts. "I work better with examples. If they tell me something that clicks, then I say, 'Yeah, I know what he means—that means this or that.' So I can take a theory or something and put it to a practical application; [then] it sticks" [Charles]. In addition, classroom interchange was not only important for the understanding of the adult student; adult students believed it was important for the effectiveness of the instructor. As noted by one student, "The teacher can't be efficient or proficient if they never get any feedback from their students to know how they're doing or what the student needs. The student owes it to his teacher to let them know that 'I didn't understand that point" [Delta].

Valued Faculty Purposefully Created Active Class Participation

Adult students valued faculty who created an active learning classroom environment. As reported by a community college student, "I think the best instructor I ever had helped me to learn. It was the instructor that was really into class participation. She wanted input from everybody...It's like learning by hands-on experience. It challenges you to do your homework and be prepared when you come to class, because you know you're going to be called on" [Elmwood]. In this belief system, it was not enough for the instructor to broadly open up class time for questioning. It required faculty who were proactive in a thoughtful way and who purposefully engaged in asking questions of students, as well as provocatively exploring ideas. Many of the adult students desired instructors who would solicit more feedback for understanding, rather than attempting to cover so much material in the classroom without the interaction. Within these discussions, students believed that faculty gently pushed and pulled students to participate. A good instructor was more proactive in getting students involved in small group discussions and in class contributions which involved opinions rather than superficial demonstration of academic knowledge required for the class. This gentle, but direct encouragement of student involvement was particularly valued by shy and less confident adult students. They appreciated the comfort of being in instructor-developed group discussions, rather than responding to direct questions in front of the classroom as dictated by the faculty.

Active Class Participation Involved Varied Teaching/Learning Strategies

Many adult students valued active instructional strategies beyond the class lecture and the opening class questioning of material. These students valued classes which offered varied formats of presentation, class involvement, and solicitation of students for constructive feedback. Adults who experienced varied formats of information presentations in their work life and upper-division adult students who had experienced a variety of classroom strategies were more often vocal about the importance of innovative and diverse instructional strategies. In addition, adult students who were in work environments reported that varied instructional strategies aided them in making knowledge connections and understandings. For example, one student spoke to the impact of case studies and related class activities which demonstrated content applications.

> For me, I find that I can learn much better that way—if I can see how it can be applied or where it has been applied. I can understand the management model a whole lot better...than if I just read about it or heard a lecture on it. So I guess you could say I learn a whole lot better through demonstration, than I do through lectures or just reading about it. [Allerton]

A subset of adult students also suggested that the instructional process should also reflect active student responsibility for learning. These students believed that active class participation should be the *direct responsibility of students for designing and conducting the learning experiences.* One senior student at Fremont offered this belief about student responsibility in relation to faculty instructional role, "[The faculty should] facilitate, not dominate....They should be there as a—just as a reference. They should not control things." This student and others who were most often in upper-division professional courses of study believed that adult students should have a larger role in the teaching and learning process of the class. This theme was also suggested by students at Allerton College. However, the Allerton students did not desire to control the design and activities of the course. They valued their active involvement in applying learning experiences in projects and class assignments related to their own work environments. However, they were very concerned about their limited time and the accelerated nature of the program. They desired faculty to structure and direct the class process. Although they enjoyed their direct involvement in application, they wanted faculty to created and conduct an efficient set of guided learning experiences.

For adult students, active class participation also represented *student-to-student interactions in the classroom.* Adult students usually valued other student experiences and opinions as they illuminated class content, theories, underlying philosophical orientations, and contextual applications. "You learn more because you get more than one viewpoint, or you get side stories that help emphasize the point, and I don't know, the hour goes by faster." Adult students believed that there were multiple realities in the world and valued hearing from other adults about their work experiences or significant life experiences. These students valued effective faculty orchestration of student-to-student class discussions. They wanted faculty to skillfully focus discussions on the topic and not allow a general discussion of everyone's likes and dislikes. These adult students suggested that garbage can discussions—a free flowing presentation of uneven opinions and ideas unframed by the faculty member—represents garbage-in and garbage-out activity.

Although adult students more often spoke to the valuable interchanges between adult students, a number of adults also valued younger student ideas and discussions. "I think when people get to be over 25 or my age—they are kind of set in their thinking and a little more rigid. I think that kids, the kids are a little more open, they will open up, they've got more interesting ideas. They may be totally wacky and crazy but I found many of them get me to thinking...I like the difference." Thus, many adults believed that alternative viewpoints in class discussions could alter adult rigidity of thinking. They believed that they became more open-minded through these class interactions with younger adult students.

Supportive Classroom Environment as a Part of Active Participation

Adult students valued participating in a supportive classroom climate. However, they voiced differing beliefs about the appropriate elements of a supportive classroom climate which enhanced learning. New entry adult students valued a classroom with significant, positive messages of valuing students and of their efforts to learn. These students were extremely cautious and looking for classroom messages that reinforced their sense of self-worth and their abilities to succeed. Reentry adult students had less concern for these issues of faculty reinforcement of student self-confidence and efficacy. However, new disciplinary content areas sometimes created feelings of anxiety and self-doubt. These adults valued faculty who developed competency and success through multiple options or opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skill in this new area. Adult students who had been successful in college for several academic semesters believed they could handle most classroom situations and therefore were less threatened by new conceptual frameworks, new ideas, and new class formats and strategies offered by faculty. Whether these students were new entry, reentry, or continuing, or whether these students came from a community college, a public university, or an adult degree program at a private liberal arts college, these adult students believed their learning was more effective and more salient when they were in a supportive class learning climate. The key elements of this more global belief about supportive class learning climate included: 1) a self-defined comfort zone; 2) a sense of community; and 3) support of adult-defined rituals and routines regarding learning.

Self-defined Comfort Zone as Part of a Supportive Classroom

One of the key elements of a supportive class climate was a self-defined comfort zone in the classroom. This comfort zone was characterized and defined through friendly, supportive attitudes between students and faculty. In these comfort zone characterizations, faculty were viewed as open to student concerns, requests, and actions. Some students reported particularly valued faculty actions, such as attempting to learn student names or providing humor or lighthearted conversation within the class. This comfort zone in the classroom also suggested that the faculty were supportive of adult engagement in learning in varied ways that suited adult learners. Some adults believed that a better comfort zone and class environment reflected an efficient, respectful, and relaxed atmosphere. These adults suggested a perspective that everyone knew they were prepared and responsible for the class, yet the class was a co-inquiry adventure in learning between faculty and students. For example, one adult spoke to this openness and how he viewed it occurring within his adult degree program class.

> I think instructors, the good ones, realize that they're working with adult students and there is a difference. We're here because we want to be, we're paying our own money in some cases... We're here because we want to learn, we're also beat because we've worked all day. We've got mortgages to pay and children to feed and spouse to fare for—that to me lends itself a little bit more to a relaxed atmosphere. The neckties should come off; and [the instructor should] sit there on the desk with your feet dangling if you want to, encourage discussion and pull from that discussion the experiences that people have had because we all come from different backgrounds. [Charles]

A relaxed, and supportive classroom for some adult students also suggested motivation and enthusiasm infused in the class as part of this comfort zone. Lower-division and new reentry students valued and desired faculty who created a class which offered enthusiasm and motivation integrated into the course content. "Most of them instill motivation. Just their method of teaching will motivate you to pick up the book and want to learn" [Elmwood]. Lower-division adult students sometimes felt a significant stretch between their past experiences and the current course content. They valued faculty who aided them in making those connections and display the excitement and value of the subject for them. In upper-division course work, adult students did not have this same expectation of faculty involvement in motivating students. They assumed that they should be self-motivated. However, they greatly valued faculty who were enthusiastic about their subject and enjoyed the classroom interaction with students in the learning process.

A Sense of Community in a Supportive Class Climate

Students' ideas of a supportive classroom environment also included varied beliefs about the nature of social and personal connections, of community with others. For many of them, limited time due to work and family meant limited interactions with other students outside of class. Most adult students valued faculty who attempted to create a sense of community in class. These time-bound students valued faculty who provided class opportunities for personal interactions with others and promoted sharing of phone numbers and small group interactions to share professional and personal experiences. Thus, a supportive class environment was one that provided for interpersonal interactions among the students, giving them an opportunity to become acquainted and to develop a sense oflearning community.

Others desired more than in-class interactions with fellow students. Some single part-time adult students noted that they saw their social life based within the classroom. Because they led terribly busy work and student lives, their only social life existed in those slim margins before, during, and after class time. Several noted their loneliness when commenting on limited in-class interactions and the lack of interest by some adult students regarding after-class social interaction. They had hoped that college studies would be more than just class lectures. Often they found the faculty member and their fellow students only focused upon the class content and not on individual interactions. Thus, they felt a sense of loneliness in their classroom and alienation because of lack of in-class and out-of-class interactions with fellow students.

This study found a number of full-time adult students who also felt a special need for social interaction on the campus. Many noted a desire to find a friendship network in this current major life role of student. Because they did not have a work environment, they desired a social life and a support network anchored within the college culture. Many assumed that this social connectedness would come from fellow adult as well as younger students. And they assumed that the base of creating that social network occurred through the classroom. Most of the full-time students noted attempts to develop friendships with other adult students. However, the development of friendships usually occurred without classroom support. These adults suggested that they developed friendships over a series of several semesters with a few adult students who participated in the same classes or who purposefully selected similar courses for enrollment. No full-time students believed that the faculty member in a traditional college classroom created a supportive classroom environment for friendship development and connectedness with their fellow adult students. A few students did report participation in professional clubs or select special interest groupings on campus as an outlet for social connectedness.

This sense of learning community meant differing perspectives about the structure or lack of structure in the learning process. Adult students in a community college setting and in lower-division courses often were concerned about making sure that they were given sufficient guidance to be successful. Some adults did not value or appreciate a classroom which was more spontaneous. They desired faculty to create support structures that gave them clear parameters and guidelines. Thus, these adults often spoke to valuing a more deliberate and directed classroom environment, a learning community which was known and understood. On the other hand, adult students in upper-division work, in both public universities and adult degree programs in liberal arts colleges, valued faculty who created a supportive classroom through guided learning among students and faculty exchange of ideas. They valued an interactional classroom community that supported their own involvement in the learning process. These upper-division adult students valued a learning community that could flow beyond the traditional expectations and boundaries of the normal class routine and was more evolving and spontaneous.

Beliefs about Class Learning and Adult-Defined Rituals and Routines

Most adult students associated certain rituals and routines with their student role and their efficacy to learn in a supportive classroom. Community college and lower-division students, as well as an occasional upper-division student, spoke to beliefs of specific concrete actions, of rituals and routines, which would help them be better students. These rituals and routines included: 1) classroom student placement and its demonstration of relationship to faculty and to the class, and 2) routines and rituals which were believed to maximize effective learning.

Class Seating Placement Demonstrating Student Commitment and Relationship to Faculty

One ritual belief was the importance of sitting close to the instructor in the classroom. This belief was dominant at the lower-division level, while upper-division adult students noted more variable beliefs and actions in selection of classroom seating related to class commitment, supportive classroom, and a faculty relationship. Those adult students, who held beliefs about the importance of seating in the classroom, spoke to purposefully seeking a seat within the first four rows of the instructor. These adults believed that by being in the front, they would have a better and clearer view of the teacher and the board. They would be able to hear both the teacher and student interactions in class, as well as be a part of the classroom interactions. A number of students believed those who made better grades were the ones who sat in the front rows. In addition, a number of adult students believed that they established a personal , supportive relationship with the faculty member by sitting in the front rows. Thus, through this seating placement, they became known and individually identified by the instructor and could more easily participate in class discussions. As stated by one adult student, "Well, most of the younger kids go straight to the back as soon as they walk in. You can tell the really young ones and then it gets a little older and older...and it moves up to the front [with the oldest in the front]" [Bayville].

Some adults reported that front row seats decreased classroom distractions, so they wouldn't miss anything. They were better able to attend to the important actions in the class. Many believed that this up-front class seating aided in a better attention span on the content, in remaining focused on the class and the faculty member, and in avoiding both class environment and personal diversions from the class, such as watching other people or thinking about non-class related interests. Most suggested that closer seating to the faculty instructor was part of a supportive, connected faculty relationship. This ritual belief was dominant in the community college students and a portion of the lower-division students in public four-year programs. A more limited number of upper-division students in public four-year programs spoke to this expectation of close seating placement to faculty and its possible impact upon their learning and successful grade outcomes.

Most upper-division adult students were more varied in their beliefs about location in the classroom. Some believed that sitting close to the instructor supported their learning and their relationship with the faculty instructor. Others noted a need to counter diminished hearing or sight. Some believed that a physical closeness to the faculty member encouraged and supported interactions. A few adults believed they could communicate their dedication to pursuing learning by sitting in front. "Everybody who sits up front to me really wants to learn...I usually sit in the second or third row. I want to learn, but I just don't want to be prominent." When asked why, she reported, "Because I think most of the professors talk to them—the first few levels" [Delta]. In addition, some adults suggested that they participated in smaller classes where they were in a seminar or circle format. This type of seating placed them equidistant to others and the faculty instructor; thus, seating arrangement was not a concern for their interactions and relationship with faculty.

Several upper-division students suggested that they experienced a shifting of beliefs about this ritual of choosing an up-front seating location in a classroom. A Fremont University student reported, "When I first went back to school, I always wanted to sit on the front—so I could show that I was a good student; but [now] if I can get a good seat in the back—that's fine too...If I can see... that's my priority...It depends on my mood where I sit [now]." Most upper-division students reported choosing the most convenient or personally attractive classroom placement when they came into class. This selection was often influenced by their desire to read the board and listen to the professor. For example, some students purposefully chose to sit on the right- or left-hand side of the classroom in relation to the faculty usage of chalkboard or the direction of faculty speech towards the class. Some chose close-up seating because of faculty mumbling or greater ease in interpreting problematic faculty writing on the chalkboard. For many of these upper-division adults, classroom seating placement was not an important variable in their learning experience. "Sometimes I sit in the front, sometimes I sit in the back, depending on the professor and depending on how big the class is and how it's structured. I really don't have a preference as to where I sit. Usually I would be located close to another student that I know" [Delta].

Beliefs in Specific Ritualistic Ways to Maximize Learning

Routines and rituals were also reflected in the course organization, adult self-expectations, and study habits of many of the adult students. Just as with beliefs about seating placement, these ritualistic beliefs were more dominant in lower-division students. For students who believed there were certain ritualistic and routinized ways to act as student, many believed that they would be "successful students" by working hard and putting a lot of time and energy into studying. As noted by one Bayville Community College student, "I think we study harder. Put more time into study. We don't cram. We study." These beliefs reflected student actions in support of their role in the classroom.

This subgrouping of adult students created routines and rituals which were sometimes influenced by the classroom environment, faculty directions, classroom organization, as well as their own belief systems. Their rituals and routines focused upon maximizing ways to retain knowledge and to successfully reproduce that "known understanding and knowledge" for faculty in class and on tests. These were dominant beliefs among lower-division students, while upper-division students held more variable and personally constructed beliefs about best ways to learn and study.

These rituals and routines also reflected adult beliefs about their potential deficit of advanced age and disrupted past educational background. Some suggested that aging required harder work to recall information from memory, while others suggested that the interruption between previous schooling and current collegiate work had created a serious gap. "If a younger student can get it in two hours, it probably takes me four. Because first of all, I've been out of the system so long that the prerequisites I had to start with are not only 40 years old, but they're way, way back on the edge of recall" [Bayville]. Thus, many adults assumed that they needed to commit more hours to studying, develop more systematic rituals around coverage of materials, and generally assumed that they would need to memorize material and recall it through a more consistent, committed, and extended studying effort.

Adult students also spoke to specific tasks and ways of studying that patterned their lives. They reported specific strategies which they used in ritualistic ways to study, particularly as it related to how they learned and remembered new content. Part of their ritual focused on studying through faculty organization of the course. They reported designing and executing their studying through faculty outline statements and faculty and text-related summaries of key ideas, contents, and processes. They believed these organizers were efficient and reflected the best use of their time. Others, mostly lower-division adults, believed that the needed knowledge was to be learned through the faculty direction. These students also reported following supplemental faculty suggestions or directions to use support material as aids in learning (such as videotapes in the learning resource center, additional book chapters, or recent magazine/journal articles). Other students valued faculty cues regarding actions and strategies for studying and learning. For many adults, faculty had significant influence on ways in which they pursued their studying. Thus, faculty modeling of specific skills or actions were usually adopted and used by these adult students. In these actions and beliefs the supportive faculty and classroom organization directly interacted with these adult students' efforts to be successful students.

Many adults, more often lower-division students, held a belief that effective learning incorporated multiple iterations over course materials by the faculty during class and by the adult student during studying times. Multiple reviews for students included reading the same materials, transcribing or outlining notes, or other similar repetitive actions. These adults believed the ritual of repetitive review created a stronger recall system as well as enhanced understanding. For example, a student at Bayville Community College noted, "Like this economics course that I have—like I read through something one time and it's generally mush. And then the second time I go back through it, and read it and it makes more sense." Students often suggested difficult material usually required three or four repetitive readings. Many students noted key rituals of creating outlines of their text, of typing up their class notes, of recording class lecture notes onto cassette tapes and listening to the tapes while commuting to and from work, and of designating specific times and places to study each week. Students at Bayville also suggested other creative study activities such as study sheets, flash cards, study guides, and extensive use of resource materials—medical dictionaries, regular dictionaries, and encyclopedias. In comparison, other students in the other five sites did not report this diversity of activities in study and learning strategies.

These beliefs and related extensive studying by adults were of troubling concern for a segment of the adult students. Some believed that adults studied too hard. They suggested that adult students were too compulsive, had lost sight of the broader life, and needed to bring a better balance between their many roles.

> I've noticed a lot of older students that will get burned-out from studying so much and it comes because they don't have a balance. They don't have a balance with their family. They just study. . . It's like obsessive compulsive. Balance, you have to have other things in your life in order not to go through burnout. But as an older person you tend to really want to do good on your grades, so you will overstudy. [Bayville]

Thus, these rituals and routines of study were seen by some as an overcommitted effort, far beyond the needed time and energy to study and learn in a course. Other students believed these rituals and routines were strategies for student success and better grades. These rituals and routines were constructed in relation to the classroom, the faculty, and personal student beliefs. Supportive faculty behaviors and classroom activities were believed to provide scaffolding supports as these students acted on stylized rituals and routines in pursuit of success.

Summary of Beliefs about the Classroom Environment

Adult students noted three broad categories of beliefs about the classroom environment. **Classroom learning as interactive class transactions** was one of the key beliefs about a valued learning environment. This belief highlighted the value of an interactive class and the particular adult student values towards instructors who created active class participation. These adults also noted the positive impact of varied teaching and learning strategies from this more collaborative and active classroom transaction.

Secondly, adult students believed **learning was based in a supportive classroom climate.** A supportive classroom included a psychological self-defined comfort zone, as well as a sense of a learning community. The third belief about classroom transactions focused on **learning through rituals and routines.** Two broad themes were included: a belief of a direct relationship of classroom seating placement to student success, and a belief in certain ritualistic ways in which faculty actions, as well as adult student actions, could influence effective recall of memory and higher performance.

Beliefs about the Influence of Younger Classmates and Fellow Adult Classmates on Classroom Learning

Previous impact studies of age-integrated classrooms have suggested beneficial influences. In particular, these studies have reported enhanced awareness of generational differences, insights into cross-generational understandings of content, and the development of an appreciation of age-related and life experience-related perspectives (Kasworm, 1990a). In this study, four institutional settings offered predominantly age-integrated class environments, while the two adult degree programs were predominantly adult-based (or age-segregated) class experiences. Adults in age-integrated class environments (community college and public university settings) suggested a variety of experiences and beliefs regarding both the value of younger students in the classroom, as well as age-integrated collegiate learning experiences. Adults in age-segregated class experiences (adult degree programs in liberal arts college settings) valued the more homogeneous experiences of all adults and the belief of significant learning exchange focused upon interactions with other adult workers in the learning environments.

Beliefs about Younger College Students and their Influence on Adult Students: The Age-integrated Classroom Experience

Adult students in age-integrated classrooms valued the participation and interactions with younger students. These adults also reported their critical observations and experiences regarding the "condition and status" of young adults in relation to a college experience. Adult students suggested a spectrum of observations about the actions and commitment of younger adult students. Some adults reported their sense of wonderment at the brilliance and intellectual competencies of some of their younger classmates. Others suggested serious concerns about a segment of younger adult students who appeared to be wasting their time and college resources. Some reported the development of friendships with these younger student peers, while others noted their preference for adult-to-adult friendships. In particular, part of the classroom transaction for these adult students was the "hidden curriculum" of gaining perspective and knowledge about the younger generation and their approach to college learning within a classroom.

Valuing Younger Student Contributions to the Class

Adult students in age-integrated classrooms valued younger students and their contributions to the class. They often reported the particular positive contributions of mixed ages, perspectives, and experience levels in their classroom learning experiences. Adults found it difficult to categorize their judgements and beliefs about the impact of younger students on their own classroom learning. However, they suggested several key influencers of younger students, including: 1) new-found respect for their brilliance and capabilities, 2) the opportunities for friendships with these younger adults and the influence of youthfulness affecting their own attitudes, and 3) the gaining of insights and understanding about the perspective and beliefs of the younger generation.

Adult students in all three types of institutional settings spoke of the *brilliance and impressive mental abilities of younger students.* "Some of them are just brilliant students...I feel like for some of them—it comes very easy for them" [Bayville]. Many noted that they admired and respected younger student colleagues. This respect also was linked to younger adults' academic abilities; "I think it helps for them to just have graduated from high school because they have the ability to pick up [information] faster, and they can relate to some things [in the classroom more effectively]" [Fremont]. Many adults reported developing friendships with young students,while a few reported becoming mentors or surrogates for parental perspectives with younger students. Most of the adult students valued younger students because of their friendliness. "They all talk, they are all friendly. If I run into them, they go out of their way so they can talk to me. There seems to be a lot more of them familiar with me than I am with them, but that's fine" [Fremont].

Many adults believed that they *personally gained from their interactions with younger adults.* Classroom learning was enhanced by intergenerational class collaboration for many of these adults. "They've come to me for help and I go to them for help. Age doesn't present a barrier when you're learning" [Bayville]. One student commented on the value of a younger lab partner and their each knowing certain parts of the lab activity. Another noted the value of having younger students to keep them informed about the campus activities. Some adults believed that these ongoing interactions with young adult students helped them feel younger. As reported by a community college student, "They're a lot of fun, they've got a lot of energy. And that rubs off on me. I feel like I've got more energy" [Bayville]. A number of adults reported receiving compliments and praise from younger students. This positive feedback added to their self-esteem and feelings of acceptance in the academic environment. As reported by a Bayville student, "I often have students come up to me early in the semester and express appreciation for my presence by saying, 'Gee I'm glad you're with us...I'm pleased to get your point of view on this or that or whatever.'"

Some adults felt their interactions with younger students gave them a *better sense of understanding and of appreciating the younger generation.* Many adults believed that interactions with younger adults made them view things from a different perspective. "It kind of offers me a reality base" [Fremont]. These adults believed they heard and saw ideas and life through a different pair of eyes—eyes which experienced a different world from their world. "The kids are great. I mean—when you're listening to them, you learn a lot from them. With the older [students], after awhile you hear a lot of the same things...but with the younger kids, they come at it with a fresh perspective." One adult at Elmwood characterized this perspective as innocence.

> It's that innocence, that child-like innocence that made me think. And I think that's true in the classroom setting, that sometimes just an innocent question or a comment from somebody who's naivete is so evident that you just are amused. It can also be challenging at the same time.

These interactions not only suggested a different "world of reality"; many adults believed it also provided them with a sense of understanding about being younger in our society. "As a father, I could learn more about the younger generation [from the classroom experience]." Most believed that the concept of an intergenerational gap was more a lack of communication and of not knowing one another. Class interactions between the generations made a significant difference in understanding and valuing each other's perspectives and experiences. "If you get to know them and what their interests are—[then] I don't feel [you have] that big of a gap" [Bayville]. However, some students suggested that misconceptions also occurred in younger students' judgements of adult students, as well as on adult perceptions and judgements of younger students.

> You walk in the first class and see all those 18-year-olds in there and you think, "Oh my gosh, I'm twice their age." And I think they [younger students also] had the perception that you have nothing else to do in your life but come and take this course and go home and study and that's it—They [younger students] have a grave misconception on what an older student goes through I think. [Fremont]

Negative Perspectives about Young College Students

Many adult students saw *younger adults as nonparticipatory and invisible in the classroom.* These adults suggested that younger students were very intimidated by faculty and by the verbal presentation of information and ideas in a college classroom. Adults often believed that most younger students were afraid to speak out and lacked confidence; others suggested that younger students were uninvolved, as reflected by passive and nondemanding malaise exhibited by these students. Some adults were concerned and upset because they did not see the young student really valuing the undergraduate experience.

> Younger students do not value the education that they're getting—or that they're not getting. I see a lot of partying and that's okay, to a certain extent.

> But I see a lot of students, they really don't take this very seriously. The ones who don't take it seriously though, are the ones usually whose mothers and fathers are paying their way. They're not the students who are having to work part-time even. They don't know what it's going to be like when they get out there—when they've got to deal with the real world. They're not going to be spoon-fed on a job...They'll probably end up back in school when they're 25 or 30 years old to get the education that they missed the first time around. [Delta]

Thus, these adults judged many younger students as squandering this precious opportunity for a college education.

Adult students would often characterize some *younger students as lacking motivation, commitment, and focus in college.* Their judgements of disinterest were based on observations of younger students' behaviors, including: not attending classes, not paying attention to the instructor, sleeping in class, trying to pass the class on another student's notes, being loud and disruptive in class, doing homework for another class during class time, dropping out of the class by mid-term, and talking about parties and dates during lectures. Adult students suggested that younger students frequently seem to place college studies on the periphery of their lives.

In particular, adult students were upset with *younger students who were disrespectful to the teacher* and to the learning outcomes of the course. Students who were disruptive in class or revealed a need to be "babied" in the course assignments and grading requirements were also judged by a negative standard. For example, an Elmwood Community College adult student noted, "Some of the younger students actually intimidated the instructor. They were rude." One student at Delta, a public university, discussed an insubordinate younger student who defied the professor by coming in late and disrupting the class. More often these issues of inappropriate and disrespectful young adult behavior were reported in the community college setting. Adults reported younger students in lower-division courses who attempted to renegotiate class assignments with less student outcome expectations or made demands upon the faculty to give them the basic outline of answers for the test. In essence, these adults saw younger students not wanting to put in the effort to conform to a learning standard set by the faculty instructor.

One subgrouping of adults believed that part of their more critical judgements concerning younger college students were embedded in *developmental life cycle stage differences.* Adult students recognized that younger adults had different life priorities important in their development. "These kids are worried about what the fellow across the room was thinking about them, or the date they had the night before. I have no diversions that way. And those are biggies for the kids. They've got a lot on their mind" [Elmwood]. They also recognized that young adults needed to make mistakes to grow up into knowledgeable adults. These adult students, however, believed that it was inappropriate for young adults to act as non-commited and resistant towards academic learning in the college classroom. They viewed the young adult world as having limited responsibilities and focus; thus they believed that these young adults had a prime opportunity to maximize their learning involvement.

> To me they seem so immature at times...and to listen to some of them talk, it really frustrates me—because they'll talk about their parents and you'll hear them complain. But their parents are paying for the education. Or they'll go out partying and you'll hear from someone, "Boy I got wasted last night." You feel like telling them that they're just throwing it away. They ought to be thankful that they're getting this right now, that they're not having to work for it. So I find it hard to relate to them. [Bayville]

In considering these generational differences and their impact on classroom involvement, adult student believed that these age-related differences also created a different grounding for student actions. They viewed adult students as serious and committed, while they often viewed younger adults as appropriately oriented to the self, the social, and the varied clichés of college life. Thus, adult students suggested that they could now focus on learning and its importance, while younger students were still more focused upon self and concerns for acceptance in a social group.

> Adult distractions are serious. Making money, looking after your family, keeping your relationship, keeping your marriage, or whatever, good. We are playing with real houses. The students are worried about having fun. Their concerns are frivolous...For grownups, our concerns are nuts and bolts, and their concerns are wings and breezes. [Elmwood]

Beliefs about Fellow Adult Students and their Influence on Classroom Learning

Adult students held many beliefs about themselves as college students and their uniqueness in engagement in college studies. This section will present several themes about adult student beliefs about adult students and their impact on the classroom learning process. These beliefs of self and fellow adult student actions come from a variety of sources—through observations, comments from younger students and faculty, and from their judgements of their fellow adult students. It was evident that these beliefs were partially dependent upon experiences of an age-segregated or an age-integrated learning environment.

Three broad themes were voiced by adult students related to adult student presence in a class learning experience. They suggested that beyond general characteristics of adult students, adult students impacted the class learning by: 1) being more achievement-oriented and competitive, 2) holding higher grade expectations that differed from younger adults, and 3) engaging in class learning differently between age-segregated and age-integrated classrooms.

Adult Students as Achievement-Oriented and Competitive Class Members

Although most adults would not admit that they were achievement oriented, many suggested that they viewed other adults as competitive and achievement-driven in the classroom, when compared to younger students. Adult undergraduates judged themselves and their peer adult students as having a special level of motivation and commitment, different from younger college students. This commitment shaped how they framed their experience and actions in the college classroom and their own personal learning engagements. Several adults also suggested that this belief was also influenced by the nature of the college environment and also their judgement of themselves as now fulfilling a "young adult" life expectation. Many adult students enjoyed the challenge of the classroom.

> I think I'm probably more motivated than most of them... younger students... it takes less effort for me to do well in class. The older students give you more competition than the younger ones. I am driven more to success, more to success than I would have been 20 years ago, because I know the ramifications and the implications of my actions. Everything that I do in the classroom, I know it's more important now. [Fremont]

This special motivation of adults was reflected in their beliefs about the importance of college as a societal institution, and of an education as an enhancement that would change their lives. Most of these adults believed that because adults participated in college without the support of society, they had a special commitment to education. They assumed that because they were engaged in college at an inappropriate time of life [assuming college was a more appropriate action for younger students], society made it difficult for them to access, participate, and succeed in a collegiate environment.

> I feel as though the adult students appreciate it more. They work harder, to get what they didn't get earlier. They know what they missed. They know the value of what they missed. And they're hungrier to capture the essence of whatever we're working with. And that's the difference between young students coming out of high school [and adult students]. [Bayville]

Subtle Dissonance Regarding Grade Expectations Between Younger and Adult Students

A number of adults believed that their desire to excel was perhaps not a valued expectation within the age-integrated college classroom. Some adults believed there was dissonance between younger and adult students because of the adult desire to get good grades. A few younger students were angry with adult students who earned higher grades and presented a higher quality of class assignment. These younger students often suggested to adults that they made it more difficult for younger students to make higher grades. Just as in previous studies of factory production lines, there was an informal norm for a certain effort and quality of learning outcome. Adult students were viewed as being individuals who did not follow this informal norm; they often were viewed as "grading curve busters." As reported in this example,

> She [the younger student] says, "Well, you all participate in class, you're always prepared, you ask questions and you show up...You kill the curve," she said, "and it just makes everybody else look bad." And my reply was to

> her, "I really didn't care." You know that's one good thing about being an older student. I have moved a little bit beyond peer pressure. And there is resentment around—between younger students and older students—because you do well. I have learned one thing in here, I don't depend on the curve, because I'm not here for the curve, I'm here for me. [Bayville]

Most adults who noted this difference between younger and older students often also reported that younger students would joke about this competitive, perfect grade orientation of adult students. A few students also noted that some younger students would purposefully select adult students to work with them in study groups, because younger students believed that adult students were better students.

Valued Impact of Dominant Adult Representation in a Classroom

Most adults in age-integrated classroom experiences suggested that they valued the spectrum of ages and experiences in the classroom. As reported earlier, they believed that this diversity was highly beneficial. However, these adults also suggested that the quality of the discussion and participation were greatly enhanced in age-integrated classrooms with a more dominant adult student classroom environment. Adults would specifically report the value of evening classes, which were predominantly adult students.

Adult students who participated in an all-adult classroom environment predominantly valued the current situation. They preferred to have an all-adult classroom or an strong adult representation in the classroom. These adult students believed they gained enhanced learning because they were interacting with students who were workers and were mature, committed adults. Although they suspected that younger adults could offer certain unique perspectives, they judged their current age-segregated learning environment as more focused, efficient, and work-world connected. They believed that they gained a more helpful perspective regarding the content and the world of adult actions and applications. Thus, in both age-integrated and age-segregated environments, adults suggested that other adult perspectives strongly influenced their own learning experiences in classes.

Summary of Judgements and Influences of Young and Older Adult Students on the Adult Student

There were a number of key themes which spoke to judgements and perceived actions by adult students as they viewed their interactions and observations of their fellow students, both young and old, in the classroom. Adult students noted several significant beliefs related to the influence of younger students. They valued younger student contributions to the class including their brilliance, their youthfulness, and their fresh perspectives. They also valued different generational viewpoints as well as being involved in intergenerational learning experiences. Adult students also commented about their critical judgements and negative perspectives of young college students. They believed that many younger college students were uncommitted, unfocused and unappreciative of college studies. In addition, adult students reported that some younger college students were disrespectful and disruptive in the classroom. These adults also judged their adult student peers and indirectly themselves in the classroom. They reported specific beliefs about the unique actions and influences of adult students. They believed that adult students were highly motivated and achievement-oriented. Thus, these adults were highly engaged in the learning experience and in the judgement structures of the course. They also viewed these traits as causing a subtle dissonance between adult and younger students relating to assignment of course grades based on class averages. Adult students were viewed as creating a higher standard of performance from younger students' expectations. In addition, a subset of adult students valued the age-segregated learning environment or a dominant presence of adult students in the class learning experience. It was believed that adult students created a different kind of learning climate and enhanced each other's understandings and abilities to transfer course content to other ideas and other settings.

INFLUENCES AND IMPACTS OF CLASSROOM AND EXPERT KNOWLEDGE STRUCTURES ON ADULT LEARNING

Adult beliefs about learning were also influenced by classroom structures, as well as key beliefs about expertise and expert knowledge structures. Adult students reported five major influences and impacts of cognitive and classroom structures. These key areas included: 1) Making meaning of knowledge and expert knowledge structures in the learning process; 2) Characterizing the nature of learning through the actions of studying; 3) Learning and studying through accessing resources (people and written resources); 4) Learning influenced by grades and learning evaluations; and 5) Learning impacted through the academic program structure.

Making Meaning of Knowledge and Expert Knowledge Structures in the Learning Process

Adult students held varied perspectives about the key influences of knowledge on their successes in learning. In particular, these adults [illegible] regarding the nature of knowledge, the ability to access and understand knowledge, and the possibilities for use or application of knowledge. There were two major perspectives of adult students' beliefs about making meaning of the course content knowledge: 1) Learning as making meaning of specific expert academic knowledge structures, and 2) Learning as making meaningful connections in relationship to academic and real world knowledge.

Learning as Making Meaning of Specific Expert Knowledge Structures

As suggested in the prior chapter, adult students often perceived differentiation between academic and real world knowledge. In making these judgements, adults also suggested a relationship between these beliefs and how these different epistemologies of knowledge influenced their meaning of knowing and acting in the college classroom and in their life roles. Adults who viewed knowledge from academic or expert knowledge structures suggested notions of knowledge as multi-layered levels of expertise and knowing. There were two slightly different beliefs regarding these expert knowledge structures and the actions of faculty and students to understand and retain expert knowledge structures. One subgroup viewed themselves at the bottom of these layers. They wanted faculty to simplify these knowledge structures to this base level of understanding. They saw a gap between themselves as novices and the faculty as experts. They believed that faculty could only aid them by "coming down" to their level of understanding. The first group required a first-time learning of new concepts and knowledge. The second subgroup viewed knowledge development through a hierarchy of re-building upon one knowledge structure to another. They did not view themselves at the beginning novice stage; they saw themselves somewhere in-between. They wanted faculty to review the earlier foundations of knowledge structures and aid them as they quickly developed to the current level of knowledge between novice to expert status. This group believed that they needed to re-establish knowledge and understanding. Thus, although both groups defined knowledge as tangible developmental levels of expertise and used metaphors of ladders, hierarchies, or other multiple-tiered symbols, they suggested different beliefs about student and faculty actions in the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

The first group of adults, the group which judged themselves as beginning knowers, valued a learning experience which was basic for their understanding and memory. They valued *faculty who recreated course knowledge into its simplest form.* These students believed that good instructors were the ones who could identify the student's current knowledge level. Armed with this insight, the faculty instructor would create clear, specific, and easily-learned knowledge experiences. These students suggested a belief in "levels of understanding and learning." They often saw themselves as beginning at the fundamental level. They realized that college studies were at a different level of knowledge from their own backgrounds. For them to succeed they required instructor intervention in changing the class-level of knowledge for their understanding and long-term recall. Thus, they often spoke of classroom learning and academic knowledge as representing rungs on a ladder. [illegible] knowledge and under-standing (at the bottom rungs) while instructors and textbooks at a much higher level of knowledge and understanding (at the upper rungs of the ladder). They believed that good instructors would "come down" to the current lower level of student ability and knowledge. Effective faculty members created learning experiences which were a "reasonable stretch" for their current understanding level. Thus, they were able to have meaningful learning experiences when faculty modified the content of text and academic knowledge to the student's basic knowledge structures. These notions were often inextricably linked with stylized language and skills. Effective instructors used more common, public forms of language and skills to initially engage these adult students in effective learning experiences. Use of special terms, concepts, and skills were viewed as demands of advanced academic knowledge. A Bayville student commented, "But the teacher would need to not only know the subject material well, but be able to bring it down from the egghead Ph.D. level, all the way down to the common, to the base." For these adult students, learning was the process of slowly working up the knowledge stairs or ladder—step by step from simple to complex knowledge. "So I went from there [not knowing mathematical fractions], to where I am now. It's a bit of a step. It's like climbing the Eiffel Tower or something. It's just so slow coming...from there all the way up to here... I'm almost to the top. I feel good about myself now" [Bayville]. These ideas and beliefs were most often expressed by community college adult students. Occasionally, this theme would be shared by a lower-division adult student in a public university.

The second group of adults defined themselves as being in movement in this hierarchy of knowledge. They did not view themselves as beginners, yet they still judged themselves as not prepared to successfully engage in the current knowledge understandings and class dynamics. Again, this group believed a student engaged in academic learning by moving up a hierarchy of simpler to more complex content knowledge. These students believed they could make meaning of complex ideas; however, they needed and desired to have the basic grounding of these ideas and knowledge structures to build upon. These adults often suggested that their break in schooling between young adult years and current adult involvement influenced their ability to recall academic knowledge structures. They faced difficulty in classes because they were unable to readily remember or lacked past background cognitive structures and conceptual organizers to understand the current complex ideas in the class. For this second group, effective faculty started with a quick review of the foundational knowledge and moved them quickly through the progression of more specialized knowledge concepts to the current level of class-focused knowledge development. Effective faculty also suggested books and readings that could also provide this background knowledge to fill in the felt gaps in knowledge and understanding. In comparison to the first group of beginning novice knowers who desired simple concepts for understanding, this advanced novice knower group saw the broader development of knowledge. They believed in joint efforts of faculty and themselves to gain the needed knowledge expertise. These views were more common among subsets of reentry community college and public university lower-division students. In particular, adults who were currently involved in their reentry and were participating in mathematics, science, and engineering courses reported these belief systems.

The development of expert knowledge structures of content was also interrelated to specific instructor actions and attitudes. Beyond the belief in how content knowledge should be organized and presented, these adult students also noted other key actions which aided them in understanding and retaining knowledge. *Valued instructors would create meaningful learning experiences by acting as a translator*—bridging academic class content either with simpler concepts or with a building block guided journey approach to the student's current level of knowledge and understanding. *Valued instructors should act as training coaches to adult students.* These adults suggested that faculty should focus on developing knowledge and skills and providing feedback to meet desired levels of appropriate knowledge and skills. "To guide a student and to assist us during our learning. If a student is having trouble with a particular thing, the professor could go back over it and present it initially in such a way that 75% of the people can grasp what you're talking about" [Elmwood]. *Valued instructors also would create meaningful learning experiences by acting as reinforcer of new knowledge*—bridging initial understandings with development of stronger understandings and recall of knowledge concepts. As suggested in earlier discussions, this subset of adult students shared strongly held beliefs about the importance of repetition to aid in recall and understanding.

> It's very difficult for the instructor to say a concept once and expect me to get it immediately. Some things I can get due to I'm older and I've been there or I recognize it. Other [concepts] are completely new and I've never heard of it before and I don't know what on earth they're talking about—and they just keep right on going. [Elmwood]

Because these adult students viewed knowledge from a hierarchy, they often noted that they made sense of their learning success through both personal acts in identifying cognitive connections, as well as in public acts of classroom discussions and evaluative feedback. A group of adult students spoke to the successful movement up their knowledge structures through verbalizing a different understanding of the knowledge. Thus, for these students, understanding of success in learning was often defined through personal metaphors and examples. Often these adults would suggest that their mind was a machine which would start to work in new and more efficient ways, while others suggested the notion of a light bulb turning on to suggest clarity of understanding and identifying connections between new knowledge and current knowledge. For example, a number of students spoke to successful learning through the notion of a "clicking in their head." This term suggested that the information began to make sense. "It starts clicking...the light goes on...the light goes on. And, Oh aha! That was very simple. It's as clear as the hand in front of my face. It's not like the fog outside. That's what happens—that you know that you are there, that you have arrived" [Bayville]. Another community college student also used this term when speaking of discomfort with limited surface recall of the material,

> I generally don't see myself doing well—I was coming out okay on the test. But I still wasn't comfortable with the way I had learned it. I just didn't feel that...something just hadn't clicked yet. You know how you get that feeling that you're trying and you're trying—and well it coming out on the test [getting a good grade] and the teacher wasn't seeing that I was having any problems with it. But I myself wasn't comfortable with that material. I didn't understand it as well as I wanted to. [Bayville]

Thus, many students judged their knowledge and understanding of the information based upon their ability to both recall the content structures, as well as have an understanding of its relationship to other structures and meanings.

Adult students also believed that these initial efforts to master expert content knowledge were an imperative for their future success. They assumed basic content knowledge was foundational knowledge for advanced understanding of specialized academic content. These students *valued faculty who created strong foundational content understanding and verified that students had understood the content.* Linked to this desire of faculty's clear communication and understanding of conten, was a belief that *meaningful learning reflected the right understanding of content.* When students believed they needed to learn, recall, and understand a specific set of assumptions and interpretations of content, they looked to the classroom and the faculty. "Well, there are classes that you take and it's definite, there's a right answer" [Bayville]. In addition, when students believed there should be "right answers," they placed more significant expectations upon the faculty and judged the classroom through those expectations (Belenky et al., 1986; Perry, 1981).

Learning as Making Meaningful Connections

There was a second major perspective voiced by a different group of adult students regarding learning and its relationship to the classroom transaction. These individuals did not view learning and understanding as the memorization of expert knowledge structures or of knowledge as levels or building blocks. For this group of adult students, who were more often enrolled in upper-level work at four-year institutions, their learning was focused upon creating meaningful understandings and remembrances of the material. These individuals did not look at learning as a hierarchical approach. In comparison, they suggested a *belief of knowledge as networking of known and understood knowledge to new knowledge and understandings.* Although knowledge concepts and structures were important, their greater concern was the relevancy and meaningfulness of the content. The creation of these meaning networks occurred through both individual students' actions, and through interactions with faculty. The adult student who sought out meaningful connection, acted in a variety of ways both in class and through studying. These adults particularly valued faculty who explicitly created classroom transactions supporting the development of meaningful connections. As reported by one adult student, "It's very important [that faculty] know what's going on in the students' heads. Because if they're not getting it, then they're not going to learn. They're [the students are] going to misinterpret something" [Delta]. This student and others believed that it was not sufficient for a faculty member to lecture on course content, to make the course content simpler in form, or to create a simple to complex structuring of course content. Effective teaching and learning meant working with the students in developing their understandings and making meaningful connections with the content knowledge.

This subgrouping of students believed faculty valued adult students who demonstrated this perspective of learning. They believed that faculty valued student who actively struggled to make sense of the content. These students understood that other students viewed knowledge as a product to be assimilated and reproduced. However, this form of learning was judged to be superficial and to lead to short-term memory retention. In contrast, they believed that learning for meaningful connections meant learning for personal understanding, knowledge connected to their current cognitive structures, and actions focused on long-term memory.

There were several major beliefs that guided these adult students in their acts of studying and learning. *Meaningful learning as a deeper understanding of the materials* was often suggested as a key goal. Many of these students had difficulty articulating this concern, yet attempted to identify the cerebral feeling. Their mental actions were not easily communicated in tangible ways, beyond noting a desire for understanding. Some adults attempted to describe these actions through their ability to understand their work, family, and society. This understanding reflected a new and broader perspective on learned content, as well as a new ability to act and apply the academic knowledge and understanding in their other worlds.

These adults viewed themselves as possessing a different mindset from many of the other students in the classroom. They saw themselves as *seeking clear meanings in the classroom transaction.* Because of this orientation, they often found themselves also acting as an intermediary for other students in the class who faced confusion or uncertainty. Often these adults saw themselves as taking the lead in asking questions or in clearing up a confusing aspect of the discussion. They would often discern that the other members of the class did not understand the lecture. These students also reported that when they had questions, they would also look at others in the class to validate confusion about the lecture. "A lot of times I could tell that everybody in class was really confused about some point. A lot of times I would ask a question hoping I could clarify it for the rest of the class. Sometimes I would actually understand what's going on, but I would ask a question because everybody else was too bashful" [Delta]. This same group of adult students also noted that they carefully evaluated when they intervened in a faculty lecture. Out of respect for faculty or from prior statements regarding class norms by faculty, many adult students held back from active questioning in the courses. They often believed that faculty disliked to be disrupted in their lecturing. Most of these adult students carefully monitored and evaluated their involvement in class discussions. They did not want to be too vocal. Because they presumed that class discussions should involve all students, they were less vocal. They wanted to support equal discussion time for others. Therefore, they often evaluated at what point, if appropriate, they should contribute relevant information or ask clarifying questions. As an example, a Fremont student spoke to how he made judgements about sharing life or work experiences and opinions in a class discussion:

> I have to decide how valuable my information is, or how my information will be accepted. In some classes I'm really able to do that; in other classes I can sit back and say, "It's really not a good idea in this class...It's better for me not to have an opinion about anything and just let everybody else rise to the occasion."

In this effort to seek clear meanings and connected understandings, adults actively observed, judged, and engaged in class activities to enhance their own interior meanings, as well as to aid other students who also desired clarity of content, if not conceptual interpretations.

Learning as Viewed Through Actions of Studying

As suggested by Vygotsky and others, adult students' actions in classroom learning were often reflected in beliefs about acts of studying. As with the nature of engagement in a classroom, the actions of studying also reflected both particular beliefs about the nature of learning, as well as the nature of knowledge. These adult students suggested a variety of informed perspectives about the nature and actions of study. For some students, studying was creating a recall memory of content information. These students viewed studying as becoming knowledgeable about the expert cognitive structures. For other students, studying and its related learning outcomes suggested engagement with past personal knowledge and life history, as well as classroom content. These adults created cognitive connections for new and unknown materials with past knowledge. Beyond these broad actions, adult students also noted particular practices of studying which related to beliefs about knowledge, learning, and its relationship to the contextual academic and life environment.

Life Experiences as a Base for Studying and Learning

In the previous section, classroom transactions were framed by either incorporating expert knowledge structures or making meaningful connections between self and content. In this current section, similar frames occurred but were spoken about through discussion of avoidance or use of past life experiences and knowledge. This focus upon the inclusion or exclusion of past experiences reflected adult student beliefs of having a different knowledge base, in comparison to younger college students. These adults made purposeful judgements about the role and utility of life experiences in relation to the learning process. Thus, a key demarcator for their study actions focused upon whether they believed their past life experiences aided them in learning expert knowledge structures or in developing meaningful connections.

When studying was framed as learning expert knowledge structures, life experiences were viewed as irrelevant. These judgements came from adults who dichotomized academic and real world and viewed them as fundamentally different in form and place in their knowledge world. At best, adult students would judge their past life background as offering scaffolding support to their acts of studying expert knowledge structures. Often these adult students reported that they could not see relationships between prior academic or life background and their current academic learning. They did not see a relationship and could not make meaningful connections between new academic concepts or terms and their life's involvements. For these adults, repetition and multiple involvements in the same material were very important. This subset of adults believed that rote memorization and repetitive reviews were the only strategies for effective memory recall. Thus, they created a memory structure, at first weak; then with continuous repetitions, it become stronger and more likely to remain for a period of time in memory.

For these adults, concept learning was often much more difficult, demanding more intensive mental energy and effort. A Bayville Community College student reported, "I feel it's hard for me in some of my classes as far as the concepts. You know...I don't know if I'm a lot slower than some of the other students or...I don't know what it is." From an upper-division student in the adult degree program at Allerton, there was also frustration about the difficulty in learning concepts:

> Other people have a much better concept background, a much better idea about the whole concept and how it all fits together. And they don't have to do as much of that [repetition] because they understand a little bit more about how the pieces all fit together. And the way they process that information is to put it in there in such a sensible way to them that it's easy to retrieve...that's a much better way to learn.

This difficulty in learning concepts often reflected a lack of existing cognitive structures to help them make sense of this new material. Thus, to effectively study, these individuals believed they should commit significant, focused amounts of time to studying. They worked long hours with varied routines to memorize and recall key ideas. Of greater concern, they could not draw upon their past knowledge and understanding to facilitate their memorization and learning process. They saw learning new materials as a highly difficult and confusing experience. Further, after memorizing terms and discrete acts of knowledge, many faced a more daunting task of creating structures which focus upon relationships of facts and ideas to these cognitive structures. As noted above, these students found memorizing to often not be helpful in creating these knowledge structures.

Most of these students reported employing unique routines and strategies to study and learn new information. These routines and strategies varied, dependent upon past knowledge of discipline area, personal comfort level with discipline, and beliefs about specific faculty judgements for knowing and understanding the content. In discussing these varied strategies, some students discovered more effective recall through use of different modalities as multiple sources of reinforcement. For example, one student discovered that he was more of a visual learner:

> To me it's just a better way of cementing the information—is to visualize it and see it typed up [notes are typed]—It means a lot to me if I can visual it and if I can put it down on paper. Then I can call that image back up and I can see something that I might not necessarily have remembered otherwise. So I have to try to use both sides of my brain. [Fremont]

This student believed that by his ability to visual the written word, he knew and understood the content. Other students established specific routines, places, and times of the week to incorporate sufficient study and review time. Most often, these adults reported a number of "reiterative rounds" of study. They also placed significant emphasis on the use of a variety of strategies, including notes, readings, tapes, and study groupings to develop a meaning structure for new ideas and concepts.

There was a *second group of adults who viewed their life experiences as being integral to the studying process.* Learning for this group was making meaningful connections between current and past knowledge. These adults judged themselves to be different learners than those who focused upon memorization, as well as those learners (predominantly younger students) who had no previous experiences to draw upon in their learning process. As noted by a Charles adult degree student,

> You come in with a different knowledge base, so we're kind of starting from a different level. I may go into a corporate finance course not knowing anything more about what's going to be covered in that course than the younger student. But I have already seen how that material is going to be applied. I've already encountered situations where that kind of knowledge would be helpful [in a work setting] and they [younger students] haven't had the opportunity yet....So in that sense, I think you learn differently. It's easier, I think, for an adult student to transfer what's doing in the classroom to the outside environment, than it is for a younger student.

This orientation assumed that new class content could be readily linked to existing life and academic knowledge. As noted by one student, "The whole exam seemed to me like it was related to that one thing. He asked it every way you could think of and I thought, 'Gee whiz, glad I thought that through.' I could relate it to something in my life, then it made perfect sense" [Delta]. For these adults, understanding of concepts and terms occurred by taking academic knowledge and cognitively grounding it into their existing knowledge base. Unlike younger students or adults without rich work experiences, *these adults drew upon their life biography to create meaning and contextual understanding.*

> In most of the subjects I'll have a little bit of outside [life] knowledge and I try to incorporate the outside knowledge with the new [academic knowledge].....But one of the things I did lately was that I reached the point where the concepts were those concepts that I had bits and pieces of knowledge from before [past academic knowledge]. And I was able to combine them with the new knowledge...It was a lot easier to retain. [Delta]

Some of these adult students also noted their *use of reflection as a tool for understanding.* Many noted ways in which they used reexamination or reflection of past understandings of academic knowledge, as well as their assessment of past and current life actions. For example, some adults reflected back upon course work and identified applications in current life activities.

> I know that when I first started taking accounting it was all rote. Basically, it was just rote memory; I memorized it. It was short term memory [and] it was gone. And then once I started working with it somehow it was there in the back of my mind somewhere. And it just sort of started dredging itself out and little by little this makes sense...[I thought to myself] "That is what I learned in class and it really works. This is the way they really do it out in the world." [Charles]

In addition to reflective activities, some adult students reported judging the relevancy of current learning to future life activities.

> The one main concern of mine would be—when all this education is over, how much of this stuff am I going to take with me into an employment situation or use later...Hopefully, if you understand the principles and you're going to have to remember them and apply them to a situation. And I'm hoping that I'm understanding enough...that I will be confident in doing my job. [Fremont]

Dual Action Perspectives of Learning and Studying

The previous section explored ways in which adults either used life experiences or ignored their life experiences in making meaning of content knowledge. In addition, a group of adults spoke to utilizing two perspectives at the same time in their learning and studying. In the first action perspective, they conformed to norms and expectations for a good college student. They acted on learning the requirements for the course, the professor's expectations and related beliefs about academic requirements to gain appropriate grades. In the second action perspective, these adults focused their learning on personal interest and linking past interests with current academic knowledge. For some students, these two action perspectives were congruent; for other adults, these two were discrepant and conflicting.

> I think you learn in those areas that are interesting to you. That is where you learn the most. You may learn a smattering of what he [professor] thinks is important, you may learn enough to make an A. But you have learned more maybe than what he set out to teach you or in a slightly different area [because of personal interests]. [Fremont]

Some adults spoke to specific work-related activities which became the focus of their personal learning goals. Others noted particular learning goals related to their children or a social issue currently in the news. Thus, some adults actively pursued their own learning goals into the broader classroom requirements and assignments. They developed class papers, special readings, and considered applications of course knowledge related to those personal learning interests. Those adults who had difficulty in this dual action perspective often found course readings, assignment requirements, and the defined parameters of course knowledge to not be flexible or support their learning goals. Some adults gave up their desires to pursue personal learning goals; some adults attempted to negotiate with faculty about special paper assignments or projects; and some acted independently of the acceptance of the faculty member and faced the consequences of their actions later in the course.

This dual perspective also had another meaning for adult students who were enrolled in the customized accelerated program at Allerton College. Students in the adult degree program at Allerton College felt caught between the desire to have meaningful conceptual learning experiences and the need to cope with the accelerated learning in this program. On the one hand, the learning experiences were more directly focused upon applied day-to-day work situations, and were easily relevant and meaningful. Background theory and concept materials, however, were often quickly and intensely covered. Thus, these students reported difficulties with recall and felt they lacked a strong understanding of the conceptual material. Some believed they had not had the time to experience meaningful long-term learning. These adults believed the accelerated program was not necessarily the most helpful format for learning materials.

> I guess with an accelerated class, I feel like I'm missing some stuff. And it's not the school's fault, they make an assignment and maybe I don't get it all done...Again, you've got so much you have to cover. Maybe the negative part of an accelerated class is you just don't learn all that you want to learn just because of the time constraints. [Allerton]

Thus, for some adult students, they suggested operating from two simultaneous perspectives. One meaning for this dual perspective experience focused upon conforming to class expectations and norms, "schooling expectations," while also creating and acting on one's personal learning goals in a course. The second meaning for this dual perspective was unique to the accelerated and applied work-oriented academic program. In this situation, many adults felt torn between desiring to learn in-depth understanding of the knowledge and conceptual frameworks, while also valuing the accelerated pace of the program and its more applied orientation to work life.

Studying and Learning Through Out-of-Class Resources and Persons

Individuals across all settings reported valuable use of out-of-class designated resources for learning and studying. However, beliefs about the selection, use, and impact of other resources in learning and studying varied. Certain adult students believed that studying and learning must be done predominantly by oneself with limited use of other resources; other adult students valued and expected other people, including faculty, students, family, friends, and work colleagues, to provide integral support and assistance. Some adults made extensive use of out-of-class related material resources, as well as the course text and the lecture notes; while other adults focused predominantly upon the text, the class notes, and their own background.

Use of Others as a Primary Study and Learning Resource

Adult students often viewed others, either within the collegiate context or external to the current academic program, as significantly important for their studying and learning. They believed that successful studying and learning incorporated a variety of individuals, resources, and strategies.

The first primary group of study and learning supporters were *faculty and academic-related staff* who directly worked with adult students in classes or related academic experiences, such as a writing lab. Faculty provided many in-class suggestions and provided opportunities for students to learn skills related to more effective study skills. However, one subgrouping of adult students, predominantly in the community college setting, believed that faculty and staff were necessary, primary resources for support and assistance in their out-of-class learning. As noted in the earlier chapter, these adults believed they needed a close relationship with the faculty to provide help and encouragement. They also needed specific and explicit activities and directions by the faculty member regarding the organization of the material, the specific topics and ideas to learn from the material, and, if possible, one-to-one coaching. These adults often created special opportunities after class, during office hours, or through telephone calls at faculty homes to gain additional advice and counsel.

A second primary group for study and learning support were *fellow students.* Many adult students valued studying with other students from their class. There were several forms for these study connections with fellow students. Many adult students used informal gatherings or phone calls with other adult students [and sometimes with younger students]. As suggested by a Bayville student, "And I find that [learning is] much more difficult if you don't have anybody to ask questions and clarify stuff. Because sometimes the textbook doesn't give you a good handle on the material. You can read it and if you're still confused—if there's nobody but a professor to clarify, then you're lost."

Beyond these informal gatherings, certain students also purposefully organized special study groups.

> I try to organize some kind of a study group—if the course is difficult and there are other people in the course that I feel that are confident enough about the material or not that confident but want to know something. I mean it's just a fact that if you want to learn something and there's somebody else that also wants to learn—if you can get together and help each other, it's a help. [Fremont]

Adult students who participated in study groups valued these interactions. Study groups provided the opportunity to problem-solve, to clarify knowledge that was not understood, to provide a "push" [motivation] for each other, and to offer feedback and validation that the knowledge was correct and understood. "And a lot of times you can understand it yourself more and clarify it more [by] trying to tell somebody else. I feel like you probably learn more trying to teach it to somebody else than you do any other way...by explaining it to somebody else; it crystallizes and clarifies it in my own mind" [Fremont]. Many adult students held a belief that discussing and "teaching" each other in the study group promoted learning content in depth.

As one unique strategy for group study, one student reported developing a walking group of four returning students. "We walk and talk about the class... getting exercise and talking about what we just learned" [Fremont]. In addition, students reported helpful small group interactions within courses for case studies, simulations, and projects. Some students voiced a belief that adult students in night courses were more likely to provide mutual study support. These students voiced a belief that night courses were better for learning, because adult students wanted to help each other. "The night class seemed much more close. I mean, we would help each other more. The day class, they couldn't wait for that, you know ten minutes to [the end of the class period] and they close their books and leave" [Elmwood]. Even talking after class proved extremely helpful for adults who could not find time to participate in study groups.

Some adult students were frustrated by their inability to identify study partners. Because of conflicting work, commuting, and family scheduling, they had difficulty in meeting with others. At best, these highly committed adults most often attempted to develop pairs or triads when studying for crucial tests once or twice a year. However, they predominantly studied alone, believing nonetheless that they had lost a valuable learning experience.

In addition to informal efforts to study together, Allerton College adult degree students experienced a required student study group as part of their program. *These small student groupings were one of the most dominant positive experiences in the Allerton adult degree program.* In this program, students were divided into groups of three to five persons, drawn from the cohort class. This study group met each week throughout the 15-month program and were assigned weekly responsibility for group projects and assignments. During class time, these study groups presented back their joint work to the full cohort group and instructor. This study group was noted as the most helpful and important feature of this customized program. Most students believed that the study groups provided team-building skills, as well as academic survival for each of the group members. "Without the study group, no individual could accomplish what they ask of you. With the study group, everyone learns to work together, depend upon each other. And that's the biggest plus the program has got going, I think, is the study group." These students believed that the study group helped them learn from different perspectives, but more importantly, it provided significant personal support and caring.

> We have a very small cohort class, we have 17 people. And over time they become your support group and you learn to talk about your fears and your problems and anything that you are having difficulty with in school as well as your problems with this group of people. And they help you work through things. So I feel like I have also achieved a higher level of thinking, of something, of introspection or something. I feel more in tune with myself and I feel better about the people around me, because I have had this kind of support.

On the other hand, as much as they valued peer study groups, the vast majority of Allerton students reported a negative perception of a study group peer evaluation which fed into their course grade. For example, "So when you're rating on one to five, everybody gets fives. And it's really not a good evaluation....I don't know how you could make it realistic. And we're friends; we're working together like this for so long and we work good together. [You believe that] you wouldn't penalize me and I wouldn't penalize you." For many of these adults, the key value of a good required study group, that of developing an intensely personal and trusting relationship, made it highly inappropriate as a base for critical evaluation.

A third primary support for study came through *personal assistance of work colleagues, supervisor, spouse and children, or hired tutors.* Adult students often attempted to identify individuals who were knowledgeable (more expert in the content knowledge) and who would be helpful in creating meaningful understanding and knowledge. A few students noted use of work colleagues or supervisors.

"Sometimes at work, I would ask fellow workers that had just graduated from a university to help me with a problem. But, in most cases, I did it by getting other resource materials" [Fremont]. In addition, 40% of students at Fremont, a public university, reported hiring a tutor (particularly for math, chemistry, and foreign language classes).

More adults turned to significant others in their lives (*close friends, spouse, or children*), rather than work colleagues or hired tutors. Their involvements represented a variety of strategies. A number of these adults spoke to creating purposeful discussions with significant others. "What helps me sometimes to master the subject is to discuss it with my husband or my children. I come home having learned something and tell the children...and then we discuss it" [Delta]. Some adults specifically created tutoring or mentoring relationships with close friends or their spouse. Beyond aiding the adult student to understand material or to quiz the student for test preparation, several spouses edited or provided feedback on papers. In addition, a number of adults used high school or college-aged children to help them understand the course content. There were a variety of examples of adults who had their children help them with assigned study problems (particularly in algebra, calculus, or chemistry courses).

The fourth primary support came through the access and use of *written and visual materials*. Many students noted seeking assistance through these non-class-related books, high school texts, dictionaries, personal readings, professional journals/publications, videotapes in the library, or related supports. Adult students used these additional materials to make sense of the course content. In addition, students who reported using these additional sources believed that an "excellent" student should be more flexible and self-sufficient by seeking out other resources beyond the classroom-required text and related readings.

Some students held beliefs about the importance of being willing to seek and accept help from other adult students. Students from the community colleges, predominantly Delta Community College, believed that part of the student role was to provide assistance and help to fellow students. "A good student is someone that is willing to help another student." These students believed that they should not only be willing to accept help from others, but that they also should provide help for others to learn and succeed. In contrast, most of Elmwood Community College adult students spoke to greater self-sufficiency.

Use of Self as a Primary Agent for Study and Learning Resources

There were some adult students who believed that true learners made active efforts to figure out the answer on their own. They believed that successful learners should be self-initiated and self-reliant in gaining needed learning background. This self-initiated learning stance was believed to be a valued behavior in the collegiate environment. These adults also negatively judged other students who assumed faculty should give them the needed help. They often labeled that behavior as "taking the easy way out." Although they believed it was appropriate to ask questions or seek clarification from faculty, they strongly believed that students could only learn by doing it themselves. Thus, other kinds of learning aids, study groups, or colleagues were used before seeking personal assistance from faculty. These adults felt embarrassed to admit that they did not understand and could not figure out how to gain understanding of content without seeking the support of a faculty instructor. Thus, these adult students viewed the actions of "attempting to figure out the answer first," as a more mature activity for adult students. As noted by one adult student, "Older students may take time to try, think something through and figure it out; where I think younger students might be more prompt to get the professor to explain it for [them], do it for them."

These adults did assume that there may be occasions when adult students would seek out faculty expertise. These adult students held self-defined parameters and expectations about acceptable student requests for faculty assistance. However, just as these adult students were judgmental of other students who requested excessive assistance from faculty, they were also judgmental of faculty members who did not provide appropriate clarification and understanding in the class. They viewed confusing classroom behavior by faculty as forcing students to seek significant faculty help or go outside of class to gain needed understanding. In these circumstances, they judged the faculty member as incompetent, and believed that they were placed in an uncompromising position to seek out understanding from outside the classroom. As examples of these self-initiated actions, one upper-division adult student [illegible] commented, "I asked [illegible] a question about something in the readings that I wanted to clarify, and she said she didn't know, and then she told me that I didn't need to know everything. So I went to the library and looked it up on my own—found out what it was myself." Another [illegible] student noted, "The student's responsibility is to be prepared and not expect that much from your professor—because sometimes, you aren't going to get it. You have to prepare yourself."

Many adult students also noted their initiatives beyond the classroom regarding advising, course/program changes, and other more complex academic procedures. Many students suggested a variety of ways that they came to know the collegiate system, their program requirements, and their understanding of the inner workings of the collegiate system. For example, one upper-division student noted, "And I've read cover-to-cover probably the catalog on all the requirements and stuff." Many adult students assumed that they had to read and understand the college academic advisement materials and catalogs for themselves. They believed that they needed to understand and articulate policies to both communicate their own needs, as well as to verify that they were meeting collegiate requirements for their degree program. Part of these actions focused on a belief that they should be in control of this information for efficient movement through a program and requirements. And part of these actions reflected a belief that they should be self-reliant as a student.

Learning as Influenced by Grades and Learning Evaluations

There were diverse beliefs expressed by adult students concerning the influence of grades and learning evaluations on studying and learning actions. One key area of perspectives and beliefs focused upon grades and their relationship to the knowledge base: 1) as an external goal of judgement, 2) as a reward and positive reinforcement, and 3) as linked to future success. In addition, learning evaluation and testing activities had specific impacts and influenced the beliefs of some adults regarding valuable knowledge.

There were a number of adult students who viewed *grades as a form of external yardstick* (to compare themselves with others or a standard of content knowledge) *or as a barometer* (establishing a goal with increment levels of development). Often these adults, particularly in their early semesters of work, placed major importance on the awarding of grades and on actions which gained high grades. Other students were more philosophical about the meaning of grades in relation to learning. "I figure it's a good gauge as to where I stand in the rest of the class. But more often times, it's more about where I stand in taking a test, rather than where I stand with the rest of the class in learning. It tells me whether I'm mastering the subject matter, according to what the professor thinks." These students believed that grades provided important feedback about their ability to measure up to the academic standard of knowing the material.

> It makes you either feel good about yourself or realize that you didn't study enough or whatever. It shows you where your problems are. Sometimes I [illegible] just two that are [illegible] st you and to give you more of a chance to learn from it. [illegible]

Others viewed grades as providing positive feedback on their success as students. [illegible] ble to show that I know [illegible] ecause of this belief in [illegible] udents suggested that [illegible] this competitive desire to make top grades is unhealthy. They believed it created an overcommitment to the charade of "making grades" and focused greater attention on the external act of making good grades than on the internal act of creating meaningful learning experiences.

In addition to viewing grades as a yardstick or as a targeted goal, many adult students who were workers also viewed grades and evaluations as analogous to job performance appraisals. "It tells you where your weaknesses are. It's just like a performance appraisal. I like performance appraisals....I think it's to let the person...know where their weaknesses are and their strengths are" [Charles].

Many saw *grades as a reward and positive reinforcement* and thus linked good grades with increased self-confidence. "I think evaluation is necessary because it keeps you motivated or helps motivate you....If you want to be the best that you can be, or do the best you can....I think it's important that everybody feels that you are doing the best that you can." Many believed that grades reflected the self-judged effort in studying and learning. "So it's just a reflection of how hard you want to learn the material, whether it was to just get by or whether it was to excel at it" [Fremont]. These adults assumed that anything less than 'A' grades would suggest that they were not fully able to handle the challenge. One Elmwood student noted "That's a personal achievement, I felt good about myself. And I proved to myself that I was an excellent student." Another student from Charles reflected on his early desire for perfection:

> When I first started school, anything other than a perfect score was unacceptable...I still have them [feelings for gaining top grades] now, but I've learned to temper them more, somewhat. They [the compulsion for perfect grades] would have eventually destroyed me, had I not learned coping strategies.

Many adults suggested that either within their own belief system, or in recognition of societal beliefs, *good grades influenced their future success.* In particular, many adults within the community college and some adults who entered as freshmen or who reentered after a significant break in enrollment in public universities believed that grades were highly potent. They viewed grades as indicators of their future ability to succeed in a collegiate environment and to be successful in future careers based upon a college education. Many students, particularly in the community college, also believed that grades were important for employment, tuition reimbursement, and future opportunities. As suggested by one community college adult student, "Anyone who thinks that prospective employers don't look at grade point averages is being foolish and naive...One of the first cuts [in hiring] that is made is the grade point average" [Elmwood]. Another student believed that grades opened doors for future employment and future admission to a particular college or academic program: "It means [my entry] into Fremont University College of Business, rather than just getting stuck in the general college. That's the first place it's paid off. It's paid off in scholarship money—and it's also going to pay off in the end when I go to interview [for a job] the first time." Also a number of adult students, particularly in adult degree programs, reported that employer reimbursement was contingent upon good grades. Many employers reimbursed employees on a sliding scale based upon grades, such as 100% reimbursement for A grades, 80% reimbursement for B grades, and so forth. For these adults, grades made a difference in their income.

Studying and learning beliefs were also related to test-taking. Many adult students believed testing, as well as grades, had a major influence on their studying and learning patterns. They suggested that tests were valuable and necessary, because they provided focus, discipline, and feedback. "It's a major influence [tests]...Well, if you didn't have tests, you would just go through the course and participate if you wanted to...It forces you to put more focus on the subject, on the course" [Delta]. On the other hand, there were other adult students who disliked tests, because they believed that tests were not relevant to the adult learning process. A number of adults believed that testing was antithetical to effective learning.

> Tests really don't test one's knowledge, basically just recall. And to me, in order for a person to have to find out if they're learning anything you have

> to find out if they can put it into practice. So to me, if you have a case study in which we actually have to apply what we've learned....I think the test should be involved in the case scenario where you apply what you're suppose to know versus recall and verbatim. [Charles]

Some adult students viewed testing and grades with some detachment. Although they were actively engaged in a system based on assessment and grading, they viewed learning as being the higher priority in the process. Thus, getting good grades and doing well on tests were secondary concerns, with the primary concern being long-term learning. "I've learned since I've come back not to worry too much about the grade. I mean I want to do well and I want to make a good grade, but I realize I'm here for the long term [learning]." One interesting perspective was offered by adult students who made a comparison between the classroom grading environment as a safer environment than being evaluated at work: "Learning in a classroom is a lot less stressful than it is on the job. In the class, it's okay to make a mistake. At work, there's always repercussions if you make a mistake."

Learning as Influenced by Program Structure

The customized structure of the adult degree program at Allerton College suggested a unique influence on learning. The Allerton program structure featured an accelerated 15-month program, a lockstep curriculum, cohort classes, and weekly study group structures, practitioner faculty, and portfolio assessment for academically equivalent life experiences. The adult students at Allerton believed these program structures had a major impact upon their learning.

Many adult students believed that the curriculum and program were specifically *designed for customized adult learning*. "It is just so much more personable than a regular classroom situation...I like the small classroom situation. I just feel like I get so much more. I feel like I am really getting my money's worth." Many students believed the program's applied work orientation was more relevant and timely for their learning. "That is what the whole program is based upon...is applied principles. How do I apply this to what I am doing? How do I apply this to the workforce? And everybody in my class is just very diverse...And so everybody comes from a different place, but we are all able to take the same information and apply it to what we are doing." There were also comparisons with academic programs at other institutions. "They discuss more timely issues and more business-related issues than we would discuss at Bayville Community College when I was in class with 19-year-olds."

The nature of this accelerated program placed a *specific expectation upon faculty instructors*. These adult students wanted instructors to be efficient and on-task. "In this program, the facilitator needs to keep the class on target, because we have so many hours we have to work in. We have so much to complete and I think someone that is familiar with the program has worked much better, because they are able to move faster and to get through it."

For many students, there was a *paradoxical tug in their involvement in learning at Allerton*. They valued the speed of the courses because it meant a lesser amount of time to complete the program, but the speed caused them great stress.

> The negative is in such a fast pace that a lot of times you don't absorb as much materials as you like...The slower pace, like Fremont University, would be much better for retention....I just hate that I didn't retain a lot more of the information...I think it makes a difference to me personally that I didn't retain that information. It makes me think a little bit less of my college degree, than it should...Because I didn't have the time to retain that information, I'm not as qualified in that area as I feel like I should be.

This paradoxical tug also affected their beliefs about faculty actions in reference to the accelerated curriculum.

> They [instructors] would [try to] follow the syllabus and try to cover the whole book in five or six weeks; it's not possible. People who had been professors in the accelerated program knew what the high points were and they would always get the most important points out to you. They knew it wasn't possible to cover a 300-page book in six weeks and do it efficiently, that you weren't going to retain all that information.

Thus, Allerton's program structure impacted the beliefs and actions of both the students and the faculty. It was evident that uniquely designed programs could potentially influence the perceptions, actions, and beliefs of adults regarding their involvement with learning and studying for course knowledge.

In examining the other five sites, no other clear themes of program structures as they influenced adult learning were reported. The only collateral discussions focused upon evening courses, more adult-oriented class environments, or other forms of scheduling which provided ease of access and potentially increased the numbers of adult learners within a particular class.

Summary of the Influence and Impacts of Classroom Knowledge and Expert Knowledge Structures on Adult Learning

This section examined five major influences and impacts of classroom knowledge and expert knowledge structures on adult learning. The first major theme was **making meaning of knowledge and expert knowledge structures in the learning process.** There were two major perspectives of adult students' beliefs about making meaning of the course content knowledge: 1) Learning as making meaning of specific expert academic knowledge structures, and 2) Learning as making meaningful connections in relationship to academic and real world knowledge. The second major theme looked at **learning as viewed through actions of studying**. In this theme, life experiences as a base for studying and learning were discussed. When studying was framed as learning expert knowledge structures, life experiences were viewed as irrelevant. There was a second group of adults who viewed their life experiences as being integral to the studying process. In addition, some adults also presented dual action perspectives of learning and studying. One form of this dual perspective experience focused upon conforming to class expectations and norms, "schooling expectations," while also creating and acting on one's personal learning goals in a course. The second form of dual perspective was unique to the accelerated and applied work-oriented academic program, with desire for broadly based learning, while also desiring fast-paced, work-oriented learning. A third major theme considered **studying and learning through out-of-class resources and persons.** In this theme, the resources and persons included: 1) Use of others as a primary study and learning resources (family, friends, co-workers, supervisors, and fellow classmates, and other visual and written resources), and 2) Use of self as a primary agent for study and learning resources. **Learning as influenced by grades and learning evaluations** was the fourth theme in this section. Grades and their relationship to the knowledge base were discussed in relation to: 1) an external goal of judgement, 2) reward and positive reinforcement, and 3) links to future success. In addition, learning evaluation and testing activities had specific impacts and influenced the actions of some adults regarding their beliefs of valuable knowledge. The final theme considered **learning as influenced by program structure**. For adults in the Allerton adult degree program, the program structure was believed to significantly influence their learning activities.

MEANING-MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN STUDENT LEARNING AND OTHER ADULT LIFE ROLES

Adult learning is situated in the learner's life context (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Unlike younger adult students whose context is the college and the classroom, adult learners are situated in work, family, and broader community roles. This context forms part of the perceptual field which defines the meaning and substantive acts in a learning event. This context also presents the relevancy and legitimacy of the learning act for understanding, application, and long-term retention. This context is part of the learner's social construction of reality.

Recognizing the primacy of context, this study also pursued adult students' descriptions and beliefs of learning connections, if any, between various life roles and actions and academic learning experience. Throughout this research report, various adult student themes and beliefs have been reported which suggested the broad influence and interrelationships between life experiences, schooling experiences, work experiences, and the adult involvement in a student role. It is evident that the context of adult life directly and indirectly impacted adult involvement in higher education and engagement in academic and life role learning.

This section explores the key themes of connections between adult undergraduate engagement in academic classroom learning and other life roles and adult actions beyond the collegiate setting. This section will present key themes and actions regarding connections between collegiate academic learning and 1) family roles, 2) current work roles, 3) broadly focused world citizen adult roles, and 4) adult student life biographies.

Connection and Impact of Class Learning with Family Roles

There were four major subthemes by adult students who described a connection between academic learning and their family roles. Although limited in perspectives, these adults did see the context of marriage and parental roles as they illuminated academic content and the nature of the student role. These subthemes focused upon 1) the relevancy of their family experiences to understand class content, 2) the impact of their academic learning on their children, 3) their role as educator of their children, and 4) the impact of academic learning in a new understanding of self and family.

Relevancy of past experiences as a basis for understanding new class content was a major theme. For example, several women students drew upon their past experiences as mothers in relation to their studying of children's development and children's learning strategies. As a volunteer aide with autistic children, another adult student noted these invaluable experiences for her understanding of a current class focused upon special needs children in education. The immediacy of raising children graphically aided these students who were also engaged in learning the academic concepts related to children and youth. In addition, a number of married adult students, noted the impact of particular courses, more often psychology and sociology, in their understanding of their spouse and children. Several also noted modeling new communications or discipline strategies based upon course work and readings from their classes.

The world of college learning had a significant influence on adult students' viewpoints of their role as parents. A second major theme for these adults was the *broader impact of a college education for the adult student as parent.* Many adult students believed that their own efforts to become more educated influenced their relationships with their family. As noted by one Charles College male student, "I'm enthusiastic about it [going to school]. This has been a tremendous positive experience for me and for my family...I think as you increase your knowledge you have to become more...understanding, more open minded" [Charles]. This adult student suggested that he saw himself acting differently towards his family and creating different expectations for himself and his family. Many of these adult students suggested that a college education was making a dramatic, qualitative difference in their lives. "I feel like I take everything from my classes into my life. I use the things I learn in my classes everyday. I use the learning to know about myself, so that I can deal with my family on a better and higher level" [Elmwood].

Some adult students *took on a parent-educator role by directly applying academic learning from college to their children's learning.* Although not a predominant occurrence across adult students with families, many adult students saw value in providing an understanding and sharing to their children of their college student study role. Thus, to both help in supporting curiosity from some children and to help children to gain insight into the world of college, these adults creatively shared and engaged their children in understanding their college work. By the same token, these adults also actively worked with their children on elementary or secondary study assignments, as they worked with their college course assignments. For example, one adult student reported that her young children didn't understand the meaning of algebra and her involvement in a different kind of mathematics. This adult student demonstrated to her elementary school-aged children the X and Y coordinates and plotting of these coordinates while doing her algebra homework. She suggested that it helped her children see the visual nature of algebra and its potential value and fun. Many adult parents reported a variety of content and skill areas which they translated into elementary, secondary, and even collegiate work for their children. One of these parents reported, "Like my algebra class, I've taken a lot of things home to help my daughter with math and homework" [Bayville]. Many adult students felt gratified to know academic information which could help their children learn. They were proud to be a valuable teacher to their children. "I know more about biology and botany; and the children come in and ask me questions and I can answer them" [Bayville]. In addition, some parents believed that college studies improved the quality of life for them and their children. As reported by one Bayville student,

> It just amazed me [in anatomy] and in microbiology, it's like when we are growing things on these petri dishes....And just like this nutrition class. I am just amazed at things that I didn't know about my nutrition and my kids' nutrition...It really amazed me to know the things that I have done to myself [through nutrition and] how that is going to affect my future.

This adult student believed her college work gave her a new understanding of the importance of her actions in creating a better, more healthy life for her children. Most poignant in these discussions, adult parents reported their beliefs about the difference that college had made in their lives as parents. Many adult parents suggested that one of the most important goals and outcomes for their college education was being a role model to their children. They saw themselves demonstrating the importance of education, as well as being able to be a better parent, a more educated parent, to their children. They believed that college would impact their future by providing a greater financial support base for the welfare of their family, but also by creating a different psychological and philosophical base for them and their spouse and children.

For some adults, *collegiate learning had created a place and time for reflection and for new understandings about themselves and their families.* These adults often found that courses caused them to examine their lives in relation to a broader world and to different philosophical perspectives. Some adults became aware of their family values and of their own growing perspectives and beliefs which differed from their family religious expectations. "I can see a lot more of the religious background and upbringing of my parents, when I took the western civ course...And I began to see where my parents' [background] with their religious values and upbringing—[I discovered] we're kind of from a Puritan type religion and ideals" [Bayville]. For some adults it provided a more philosophical orientation to their lives.

> And I have enjoyed those classes [philosophy, logic, psychology, and literature], because it has gotten me to think more again about what life is and where we are going. I don't mean me. Where we're going, where man is going? What's the purpose? What's it all about?...being a homemaker, raising the kids, being so involved with that, that you let that part of you go. And I have enjoyed that part of my student learning. It has carried over into my own life now. [Delta]

The collegiate learning experience had an impact upon adult students through their relationships and actions with their families. It greatly advanced their beliefs about encouraging and modeling education for their children and their spouses. In addition, it provided a base for understanding and reflections about themselves and their values as they related to their families and the broader world.

Connection and Impact of Academic Knowledge to Current Work Roles

The most prominent discussion of connections between the world of the college classroom and adult life focused on work roles and relationships. There were five key themes expressed by adults regarding the relationship of their work life knowledge to academic classroom knowledge. These themes included: 1) work experiences influence understanding and retention of academic knowledge, 2) impact on academic learning in their current work, 3) impact of increased verbal skills on job performance, 4) creation of joint work and class projects, and 5) work experiences creating a different judgement base for academic content.

The context of work experiences significantly influenced adult student engagement in cognitive learning activities. Many adult students drew upon past work experiences to understand and to apply knowledge both within the classroom, as well as at their work site. *Certain adults noted specific areas of work life which influenced their ability to understanding and retain academic content.* Adults who were from upper-division work were more likely to report viewing their work connections as an important basis for making meaning of their course work. In addition, a few adults coming from the lower-division settings of the university and the community college also suggested the importance of work experiences for academic content understandings. These students suggested examples of meaningful connections from work life to illuminate academic content understandings, such as the past work of carpentry with current engineering courses, issues of abuse cases in a human services agency to current courses in child and family relations, and involvement in a supervisory role with management courses. For example, one Elmwood student who had been an electrician reported,

> And having to make calculations, it was almost like second nature just like right into play, that was my experience. I didn't have to think about it. "Oh, you mean this is called solving for a variable. I've been doing that all my life." And I didn't know that's what it was called. And yes, maybe I do achieve better now than I did when I was a child because of my work experiences. [Delta]

Often these adult workers would report that academic learning provided them a name or a label, as well as a conceptual understanding describing a past or current work experience. Many adults found this ability to designate a formal label for a work phenomenon and to more intricately investigate its dimensions and qualities of significant importance. Many viewed the newly gained discourse to make a difference in their own work lives, their value within the work setting, as well as aiding them to relate to others and the work effort in differing ways. In addition, adult students reported that because of their class readings and lectures, they viewed their work from a different perspective. Sometimes, these adult students would become more critical and judgmental about a specific aspect of work life after specific class topics and discussions. Other times, they would report a new appreciation of the complexity and relatedness of work in relation to a more conceptual understanding.

However, adult students' real world knowledge of work also created specific issues within the classroom when faculty focused upon analogous academic knowledge of work. When adult students judged themselves to have more knowledge expertise than the faculty member on the subject, these students noted several decision issues. At these times, they either determined that it was appropriate to share their expertise with the class, or determined that their input was unwelcome or would threaten the faculty member. Thus, having more knowledge was not necessarily a valued asset for these adult students. Further, these adults found that their real world knowledge and expertise at times conflicted with the academic knowledge of the content. Thus, the potential value of context work experiences became a detriment in their memorizing academic content knowledge for test retention. They found that they had to learn a different world perspective which did not necessarily agree with their known and lived experiences with the particular topic.

As a second theme, *adult students believed that certain academic knowledge experiences had impact on their current work environment.* Engaging in academic content learning in college did influence their work practices and environment. These adults reported a wide variety of impacts, such as modifications of accounting practices, ability to write up a business plan, or working computer applications. A student at Delta commented,

> The new horizons that have opened for me and the knowledge that I have acquired—being able to use that in the workplace, and seeing that knowledge at work. So that just kind of adds fuel to the fire—that I've come this far and I have so much farther to go. And then I can actually see some improvement—as far as my thought process and the things that I accomplish at work.

A number of adult students reported how they applied academic knowledge to their work site. In these applications, they attempted to understand the knowledge, as well as apply it. Other adults noted that by applying academic knowledge to their work setting, they came to understand the theoretical structures and interactions of a knowledge concept. As one Fremont student noted the value of engineering classes at his work, "What seems in theory just bizarre, that it would never work—and you can go out to work and you can see it." A nurse and adult student at Fremont reported, "There are a lot of ethical things that are coming up at work. And I'm taking this class [medical ethics] to see how...it should be, how it is really out in the field when you're using it." Another student reported,

> This accounting class that we just finished up recently, I was able to take it back and apply practically everything that I learned to my job...And after I finished that class, I said [to the boss], "I think I'm ready to give that [the

> departmental budget] a look." He handed it over to me and I never gave it back. And I was able to handle it on my own from there on. [Allerton]

Some students noted that *college work had strengthened their written and verbal skills, which in turn also influenced their job performance.* "Maybe one of the best ones for help on the job was the communication skills I've learned here. I have learned how to write for the first time, properly" [Charles]. Written and oral communication skills were often valued as a way of providing greater access to future promotions and more responsible management activities. In particular, a number of adult students in the Allerton adult degree program noted a belief that their past communication skills had held them back in their work life. They now believed that newly gained skills created a better impact on other work colleagues and supervisors. "I'm able to talk to people better. I probably listen to people more than I used to. I've learned to be a better speaker. And I've learned to pay more attention to what others say. And I try to learn from what they are saying all the time."

In discussions of various connections between academic learning and their work experiences, a *few students reported combining their work projects with their class projects.* One economics major who was a union negotiator noted,

> We were on this committee [at work] that focused upon drug and alcohol abuse. And I was going to write an essay [for English class on the topic]. And in doing so, I did rather well in the class on the essay, and it gave me some good solid background in how to deal with individuals who were using drugs and/or alcohol. [Delta]

Other adult students noted opportunities to apply certain class assignments which directly met specific job requirements. However, students suggested that they saw more opportunities for combining school and work through research papers or English essays. Other types of assignments often did not allow the adult student to integrate work and school joint learning projects.

Some adults, particularly in upper-division courses, suggested as a theme that *work experiences created a different judgement base for them.* They found that they sometimes rejected academic knowledge which was incongruent with their known work application. In addition, they would reject course content, because they did not find the course content applicable or reflective of their work realities. "[The course text] it is fun to read, but you've got to take this line [in the course text] and [judge]—that'll work in the real world. But everything else just—you might as well throw it away...I find that to be true in a lot of courses that I've taken." Another student discussed the difficulties of being in a work world environment and handling a current course content which does not reflect the real world.

> It's so hard after you've worked many hours, to be able to sit down and concentrate on something like accounting, especially when you do it all day. And your book has the unreal situations—when you've done real life situations all day. You think, "This is garbage. How do you they [text authors] get ahold of this unreal material?" [Charles]

A number of adult students suggested that they created a mental compartmentalization in handling the incongruence between academic and working knowledge. They often reported judging academic learning as hypothetical and ideal, while judging work learning as more situational and embedded in the specific work context.

Connection with Broader Life Perspectives and a World Citizen Role

Adult students noted limited involvements in leadership or membership roles in their community during their collegiate participation. College attendance basically was exchanged for any involvements that they may have previously pursued as citizens and community leaders. Thus, few adults reported direct impact of collegiate learning upon community service roles. However, many noted that the collegiate experiences changed them as individuals who acted in the broader society. These themes focused upon the connectedness between their adult student role and the broader life perspectives and world citizen role. Themes included: 1) gaining broader understanding and awareness of self and others, 2) impacting their adult leadership roles in the community, and 3) influencing their role as a world citizen.

Many *adult students reported gaining broad understandings and awareness* of self and others from the diverse perspectives of courses. Many adult students noted becoming more open to different kinds of people and ideas. For example, one student suggested, "It has made me a more open-minded person. School has pretty much mellowed me out. Made me slow down and look at things in different perspectives." In taking astronomy, one adult student reported this same delight with a new awareness of life. "I am so much more aware of what is up there and I feel that way about being in school. I think it's truly a way to enliven my brain—not to learn more things; but to become more aware of things." An Elmwood student reported, "I think college has made me more open minded, but I still have my own views. You know, before I was like Archie Bunker, but now I'm more open minded ...just to get other people's views and opinions...but I will listen to their views now]." This broader awareness was also reflected in a keener sense of the humanity of the world. As noted by a community college student,

> All of the interaction I've had just because I'm in college...has taught me to be more sensitive to people's needs....And so college has made me more well-rounded—[and] in being able to relate to pain that other people have...But I realize that [with] every semester I find myself just feeling more in touch with my world and the people in it. [Bayville]

Many adults believed that both the content learning and the experiences of collegiate involvement had a positive impact upon their sense of self understanding. "Having more of a broader span of understanding and relating, more confidence, more aggressiveness. Schools brings all that about." This impact directly influenced how they saw themselves as part of the broader world and their expectations to be part of that broader world community.

> I didn't understand the weather man on the news for a long time until I took geography. You know—being able to understand. I didn't know what GNP was and I hear about the national GNP of various nations. Now I know how to calculate it. So I can relate to world news better...I'm a much better person. I'm very pleased with myself, because of my coming back to school. [Charles]

As part of this impact, many adults reported that they now looked at and understood the newspaper and the TV reports from a different, more knowledgeable perspective. This theme was more often reported by adults who were in the community college setting and involved in introductory, lower-division courses.

> When I took that course [introductory biology], I was amazed every time I opened a newspaper and read things. I said, "Golly it just goes right along with the course I'm taking. This is weird. This is strange." And then I noticed it with everything I did, and I thought you know, people don't even know what they don't know. Sad. Because you just read the paper and you never see the stuff because it doesn't mean anything to you. [Bayville]

Another student in a community college noted the relationship of history courses to his newspaper reading.

> Before I started college, our local newspaper that I've always subscribed to and I've always read—most of the time the only thing I ever had done was work the crossword puzzles and read the comics. I wasn't seeing anything that was interesting to read and didn't know how to relate it anyway—especially if it was world news. History classes have changed that a lot for me....The history classes I've taken have taught me to be more aware of the activities going about us in the world. And so I can read a newspaper now, and it makes sense to me....I could read it before. I could read all the words perfectly, but I didn't know how to relate it. [Bayville]

A few students noted the *impact of college on their adult leadership roles in the community.* For example, several of the students took actions as adult citizens in regards to the funding levels for public higher education. During the period of the study, all of the research site public universities and community colleges had experienced serious budget cuts. For example, one individual wrote a published letter to the editor of the city newspaper presenting his perspective on the significant work of faculty and the major problems of funding cuts for his university. Another example by an Elmwood African-American community college student focused on perhaps one of the most eloquent vignettes of classroom learning in a community environment. He spoke to the influence of learning about St. Augustine and other early philosophers in his college courses and its application to his church instructional program.

> We don't preach about him in church, but when I found out who he was and the contribution he made to the Christian church, it was astounding. And to be able to go back to church and to facilitate and use what I've learned in

> the classroom...it was exciting. I mean it was something they had never heard, who is this St. Augustine and who is this Eramus person, who is this Martin Luther fellow you're talking about? And I was able to use that in church...and so it was a very positive experience.

Several adult students believed that their *collegiate course work had direct impact upon their future role as a world citizen.* "The majority of what I learn I do not use on my job. [But] as far as using it in life, in general, yes...You use it very extensively when you go into a voting booth to decide which levers you're going to pull" [Delta]. An adult degree student at Charles College reported, "I am more interested in my community now than I was...I didn't feel like I was adequate. And now I feel like that maybe I am. I feel like that I could contribute a lot, whereas before I didn't feel that way. So it's helped me, I've gained a lot of self-confidence." Many of these adults felt that their new knowledgeable of self and world enabled them to take action and be more responsible for their world.

Connection of Learning with Adult Student Life Biographies

Many adult students reported specific global connections of their past life biographies with their current role as a college student. Adults spoke directed to this linkage and relationship in the themes of: 1) creating greater understanding and valuing of general education courses, 2) building upon common sense understandings in past knowledge towards more refined, complex, and holistic understandings, and 3) making connections between life experiences and their current student role.

Adult students believed that their own life histories provided the grounding for *greater understanding and valuing of general education courses,* such as history, geography, English, meteorology, political science, and economics. A number of individuals suggested the valued impact of prior traveling, of living in different countries or in other regions of the United States, of interacting with different cultures, and, for a few, of serving in the military. For some individuals, these past experiences also translated into connections and understandings as expressed in the earlier key themes for work, family, and world citizen roles. These learning connections with their life biographies often reflected many of the sage expectations of a liberal arts education, such as becoming more open-minded, more well-read, more knowledgeable about other cultures and values. For many of these students, college had changed the nature and quality of engagement in life activities by creating a more broadly focused and sophisticated understanding. As suggested by an Elmwood student,

> I'm even going to plays now and things, and they're interesting. I've always loved comedy. And now comedians are even making jokes on levels—that if you haven't been to college it's totally over your head. You'll miss the true meaning of the joke. And a lot of these things I didn't realize, until after I'd had philosophy and sociology and anthropology.

Adult students also reported background experiences which added dimension to academic and personal understanding. *Many adults found that they had gained a common sense knowledge from past experiences, which was translated through* *college to a more refined, complex, and holistic understanding*. As part of this differentiation and sharpening process, many adult students gained a more differentiated perspective of prior common sense understandings of past experiences. Many students saw both the direct relationship between English and psychology courses and their past lives, as well as new reflective meanings between these ideas and their lived experiences. Adult students were able to draw upon their past lives to write about experiences in English papers or to relate to psychological or sociological principles. For example, an adult student commented, "I think life experiences do contribute a whole lot to your understanding and your education. A lot of the science courses that I'm having now—I find that having been exposed to the concept or exposed to certain areas I am [now] able to apply it, or that it seems to congeal better or crystalize better."

Some adult students saw *past life experiences as key learning skills which helped them in their current student role.*

> Certain skills that you learn—your life experiences, techniques that are required to problem solve in a course. You just take things that you learn in your daily life experiences—what it takes for you to do these things and you just apply them to your classes. There are certain steps required for you to, you know, to get from step A to step C that are from life's experiences—just like changing a Pamper. [Elmwood]

Many people believed they were better students because they could problem-solve and could allocate their attention and resources in effectively respond to student commitments.

In addition, a number of adult students suggested that their college experiences created a repertoire of skills, knowledge, and attitudes which would serve them through their lives as lifelong learners. An adult degree program student at Charles College noted, "I think one of the things it's done is woken up my mind again. I think faster, I read faster, I ask more questions...And I can't wait to be a senior [citizen] when you can go [to college] for free forever."

Summary of Meaning-Making Connections between the Student Learning and Other Adult Life Roles

Adult students reported utilizing their past life biographies, as well as current roles of family, work, and community/world citizen to influence their understanding and meaning of academic content. There were significant variations with adult students in the applicability, utility and valuing of other life experiences in relation to learning and understanding academic knowledge. However, adult students often found their maturity of past and current life involvements to aid them in making meaning of academic concepts and knowledge structures. Thus, adult life experiences for these students were often assets in their role as student learner.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER FINDINGS

This chapter explored adult student beliefs about learning in the collegiate classroom, key influences of academic learning, and the impact of being an adult student in making meaningful connections between academic knowledge and other adult role involvements. These adult students presented differing beliefs and actions in their perceptions of the classroom and a quality collegiate learning experience, as well as their beliefs of how faculty, class structure, and younger and older students influenced their learning. They also noted diversity of beliefs about the influence of their actions of learning and studying and the influence of grades on their involvement in learning. Interwoven within these beliefs and actions of academic learning, it was also evident that adult roles and life experiences as family member, worker, community leader, and world citizen had meaningful influence.

The chart of **Categories, Themes, Beliefs and Actions in the Classroom Learning Experience by Adult Undergraduates** was developed to delineate the key categories and themes for the three groupings of adult students: 1) Lower-division students in Community Colleges, 2) Upper-division and lower-division students in Public Universities and the Adult Degree Program in a Private Liberal Arts College—Charles College, and 3) Upper-division students in a uniquely structured Adult Degree Program in a Private Liberal Arts College—Allerton College.

In reviewing the findings, it was evident that in selective ways adult students differed in beliefs about influences of classroom experiences, either by academic standing (lower-division versus upper-division standing), by new entry/reentry versus continued involvement, or by institutional setting context. Thus, the variations of beliefs and actions in these adult students suggested differences according to past experiences in academic settings, by entry/reentry status, by academic experiences of lower- or upper-division classes, and by life role experiences. In particular, work roles and previous collegiate enrollment experiences suggested potent impacts upon current adult student involvement. In addition, the diverse perspectives and meanings presented by adult students supported further study regarding students' epistemology of knowledge and cognitive beliefs about learning and knowing. Unlike earlier studies, these findings illuminate that there are no simple organizational or behavior actions which successfully influence learning for all adults. However, these findings also created additional support to a number of principles and assumptions regarding adult learning. It was evident that adult students judged the college experience within the classroom and in relation to the faculty instructor. They placed key importance squarely within the classroom relationship and the related influence of academic knowledge and the instructor. Further, they had specific beliefs about particular aspects of the socialized structures and forms of college classrooms, such as class organization, structure, dynamics, and membership. They also noted specific influences upon their learning as they chose to seek either maximized retention of new academic expert knowledge structures, or of creating meaningful connections between academic knowledge and their cognitive background and current life involvements. These findings suggest that adult students were actively engaged in creating their sense of a learning environment and their expectations for standards of learning in the collegiate classroom.

DISCUSSION OF THE ADULT CONSTRUCTION OF BELIEFS IN STUDENT ROLE

Adult beliefs about the college student role; the negotiated meanings about self, student and adult roles; and the related actions of learning with both academic and real world knowledge are the reality of adult undergraduate education. These beliefs, meanings, and actions deeply influence adult students' perceptions of the college environment and the nature of participation. These beliefs have a significant influence on how adult students judge themselves and others, as well as how they judge their actions of learning in the collegiate environment.

In listening to the voices of adult students who were on different life journeys and at different places in their collegiate pursuits, the listener is caught up in the dedication, the conflict, the concern, and the excitement of their undergraduate involvement. Clearly, these adults are seeking a different life and are engaged in different kinds of thinking and learning. These adults are engaged in academic learning both designed by the academic environment and the faculty, as well as designed through the socially constructed world of the learner. Learning for these adults is extremely focused upon external indicators within the judging classroom, as well as embedded in a more self-oriented personal and philosophical inquiry, understanding, and application related to other worlds. The acts of student life and acts of learner life are in limited ways the outward behaviors of a student in a classroom or the presence of an individual on a college campus. Beyond the external behavior of student on the campus, these adults presented a very rich tapestry of thinking, actions, and connections with their broader world of adult life. These adults spoke to a student life that was clearly an interior experience, influenced by many collegiate figures and events, as well as connectedness to family, work, and broader world figures and events.

Key areas of adult as student present commonality and diversity of themes. These areas include the following sections:

Entry and Socialization Process

Adults entered or reentered the student learner role with specific beliefs that influenced their actions in the collegiate setting. They acted from both private belief spheres of self-knowledge and from public spheres of socialized constructed beliefs about student, collegiate setting, and societal judgement. Their past experiences with collegiate involvement and their current participation in a particular college environment appeared to frame the construction and socially negotiated beliefs about the nature of collegiate learning. Their unique life biography and current life journey of successful and unsuccessful life involvements in marriage, family, work, and broader life actions also shaped their beliefs and actions as they entered and became socialized into the student role.

Unlike previous discussions of young adult collegiate entry and socialization, adult students represented not only a different group, but a variety of differing groupings of constructed beliefs and actions. Adult students were a diversity of voices. Just as in a symphony, they each offered a special set of strengths and complexities which added to the eloquence of a college and of a community. Yet these individuals were different in fundamental ways. They appeared to outwardly be congruent to role behaviors of young students, yet inwardly they were truly unique in belief and action. Colleges, faculty, and staff who attempt to define adult students with single themes do an injustice to this group. Thus, current beliefs about entry services of orientation, socialization, and support systems only deal with *beliefs by college faculty and staff* concerning the nature of the adult student and will serve a subset of adults. Further, most of past stated beliefs regarding the nature of adult undergraduates as reported in the literature are flawed. These discussions usually focus on aiding the adult student who "enters for the first time" into the collegiate setting. As was evident from these discussions, the more significant representation of adult students were college students who were returning, transferring, and re-entering. Curiously, little literature in higher education and adult education speaks to ways to better aid entry and socialization of these categories of individuals. Yet, in this world of lifelong learning, this cyclical reentry and continuing involvement will become more normative in the future.

From this study, it was evident that past backgrounds of adult students accentuated their adaptation or lack of adjustment into the collegiate environment. First-time entry adults strongly desired to become members of the academic community and to prove to others, as well as themselves, that they could be successful as students. Many looked to outward signs of first classroom contacts and first tests as important statements of becoming acceptable in this academic world. As part of this proving game, many adults also acted on a strategy of establishing limited, incremental goals. These adults entered with anxiety about fitting in and being accepted. Their commitment to college enrollment was viewed as a personal test of their abilities and worth. To not complete the commitment or to not do well in the commitment was to fail themselves and perhaps others (family, spouse, or parents).

Most adults in the study were reentry students who focused upon adaptation to a different academic environment. In these situations, they were more confident about themselves as students, yet also were very observant to act and produce in acceptable ways for the particular classroom culture. They were also in a judging posture—both conducting comparative assessments between themselves and others, as well as between current and past institutions. Across the spectrum of adult students, there was variability in frames of judgements, beliefs of life efficacy, and learner actions.

In these entry and reentry actions, it was evident that the particular place, status, and context of the adult student did relate to their unique beliefs and perspectives of themselves and their student involvement. In these actions to either become an accepted member of the academic community or adapt to a new collegiate environment, these adults noted several supports for entry or reentry. Most viewed faculty, select staff, and themselves as aiding in the entry process. Although some students pointed also to specific institutional supports, most saw the key support coming from faculty and significant others in their lives. They did acknowledge the importance of special admissions policies, special scheduling or academic formats for adults, as well as special academic programs. However, they believed that primary support was focused upon the personal interactions—of faculty, select staff, and significant others in this journey.

Socialization for adults focused upon three areas: stairstepping from prior experiences to current student role, resolving uneven knowledge and skills, and learning how to learn and study. Socialization was influenced in four differing action beliefs by adult students as they projected future success linked to their life biographies and actions in their new adult student roles. These adults drew upon their own past success as adults, as successful adult workers, as adult students, or in a belief in the process of work ethic for future student success. As part of the socialization process, new entry and reentry adults often faced concerns with uneven knowledge and skill background for current demands and expectations of college work. Community college adults predominantly valued developmental studies programs, while those adults in four-year schools noted a variety of other strategies to develop needed background to meet current course demands. Lastly, adults suggested a variety of strategies in their learning-how-to-learn activities as part of the socialization process. These four key strategies were expressed by different adult groupings and included: creating activities and organizers that would maximize the retention of content knowledge, perceiving learning through faculty organization and direction in the course, believing application of classroom knowledge related directly to their own world of actions, and, lastly, valuing the application of knowledge in the world but moving beyond concrete application to focus upon deeply embedded conceptual meanings.

There were a number of key influencers of entering and participating in the student role. Many adult students who were first-time entry spoke to the paradox of being an older student, not fitting the norms of a societal expectation for college attendance in the young adult years. Eventually these adults found an acceptance and the absence of assumed judgement of their actions as adults in a young adult environment. In addition, many students noted both positive and negative influences of aging upon their learning. Those who had been first-time entrants or reentrants with a significant gap in enrollment more often felt an age-related deterioration in their memories, while those who were recent reentry and continuing students felt that aging had positive impacts upon their learning.

In this initial entry and socialization process, adult students observed the differential influence of instructional and learning strategies between select academic disciplines. These differences most often raised issues with instruction in sciences, mathematics, and engineering and perceived faculty detachment and disinterest in aiding students to connect with the learning in these hard sciences. In addition, adults also raised questions about their abilities to engage in mathematics and sciences after a significant break in schooling.

Because of significant experiences in their adult lives, these adults also engaged in learning, thinking, and acting on knowledge connected to their other life roles. These students voiced a variety of relationships and value positions in understanding their adult life world of real, lived, and practical knowledge, in relation to their student life world focused on academic knowledge. Adult students suggested five varied perspectives about perceived influences of real world knowledge as they engaged in student learning-how-to-learn in academic knowledge. One group believed that they had to endure lower-division courses as necessary and foundational academic knowledge, to participate in future relevant, helpful, and practical knowledge in upper-division courses. These students focused upon memorization and recall, assuming that later academic knowledge in which they would be engaged would be more relevant and meaningful learning. A second subgroup considered learning as a reinforcement, a further illumination of their past knowledge, or an authentication of their expertise. These individuals continued to hold this belief of real knowledge as the dominant and valued form of knowledge in their lives. The third subgroup was suggested by students who entered classes with a critical and judgmental evaluation of academic content. They elected to learn academic content when it was relevant and applicable to real world actions. The fourth group valued both academic and real world knowledge, but they came at academic knowledge from its embeddedness of real world knowing. Thus, they gained further understanding in their real world actions from the frame of knowledge, theory, and constructs of academic knowledge. The final subgroup represented adult students who desired to become part of this academic world and viewed their full immersion in the academic knowledge base as an important part of that effort. They attempted to make active bridges of understanding and meaning between academic and real world knowledge.

As suggested by a number of post-Piagetian theorists, these students represented a series of positions regarding a dichotomized world view of academic and real world knowledge, learning, and the dominant concern for meaning making. However, unlike previous discussions through post-Piagetian studies, this group of adults both engaged in these cognitive and life developments through the classroom, but equally important, they engaged in these cognitive developments through their lives of family, work, and community involvement.

Beliefs about Learning in the Classroom and Adult Life

The center stage of these adult students was the classroom, with only peripheral interest and concern for the broader university culture. Thus, the direct involvement in the classroom became the setting for creating and negotiating meanings for learning, for being students, and for defining the collegiate experience. The power of the classroom experience has been somewhat understood in prior literature on college student development and on teaching and learning in higher education. However, for these adults, there is a sharpened focus on this dynamic of classroom engagement as the base for learning and for defining of actions integrated with learning.

As these adult students spoke to their lives as students and their perceived values of faculty, students and classrooms, there were clear socially constituted terms and definers that represented socialized academic beliefs. Not unlike other students, they reported similar beliefs, as younger students concerning quality teaching, quality classroom experiences, and quality instructors. Beyond the more socially identified boundaries of the classroom, the adult student further suggested that they came to the classroom as both an "observer" as well as a participant. They suggested that they came being a "foreigner" with a set of experiences and beliefs different from the younger college student culture. Thus, they conformed and acted in socialized constructed ways appropriate to a college student in the classroom. Yet, they also saw themselves apart from the younger college population, and somewhat also apart from other adult college students. For these adult students, their sense of worth and meaning was strongly embedded within the judgements and actions of the faculty instructor. They judged themselves within their classroom experience; the faculty member's judgement was powerful in their beliefs, actions, and self-definitions. Further, they understood themselves as attempting to conform to the perceived norm of the classroom, "the norm of the college student role—as defined by the ideal younger adult student." They also saw themselves as renegotiating their sense of themselves as adult students—as defined by worker, parent, reentry or new entry student status, and as an individual seeking a college degree in their middle or later years of life in contrast to societal expectations. For most, these renegotiated meanings were unsaid, silent thoughts in an alien world of youth. Thus, these adults were very outwardly self-sufficient and inwardly creating a self-made path towards a college education. As adults, they came with a more detached and complex understanding of themselves, of institutional policies and workings, and of key actors (such as faculty) who were personalities and individuals as well as roles. This differentiation of perspectives about themselves and others created a set of actions which provided adaptation, as well as self-initiation, beyond the boundaries of student role and college experience.

Adult students valued a well-designed course, knowledgeable and committed instructors, supportive classroom relationships, and a class size which provided personal interactions with faculty. They also held a higher standard reflecting faculty enthusiasm, motivating active learning interactions, skillful instruction, collegiality, and a respect and helpfulness to adult students. They believed effective learning came through active class involvement, a supportive community-based classroom environment, and a meaningful in-class faculty-connected relationship.

For these adult students, their sense of worth and meaning was strongly embedded within the judgements and actions of the faculty instructor. They suggested four differing types of relationships between adult students and faculty from a belief of god-like qualities of a faculty member; faculty as accessible experts; faculty in a quasi-peer relationship with adult students; and a true partnership between equals between faculty and adult students. They also noted their belief that the better faculty valued adult students and their work/life experiences, held higher expectations for adults, and had an understanding and made allowances for the conflicts and stresses of adult life.

Adult students had specific beliefs about the classroom environment. They believed in active involvement through committed attentive presence in the classroom and an active cognitive interaction with course ideas. For many, it meant active involvement in discussions, for others it meant purposeful listening with only select verbal comments of discussion. Most adults valued faculty who purposefully created class participation and used other varied teaching/learning strategies. They valued a supportive class environment which included a self-defined comfort zone, a sense of community, and a support for their rituals and routines which supported their learning. Most adults believed they valued a relationship with faculty which was created in the classroom and represented a connectedness between faculty and adult students. This connected relationship was created through their respect towards faculty, their commitment to academic work, and through faculty helpfulness towards adult students.

Differences between beliefs and experiences of age-integrated versus age-segregated classrooms were evident in these adult students. For those who experienced age-integrated learning, they valued younger adults and their contributions, as well as reporting distress with younger students who were uncommitted, disrespectful, and unfocused on college goals. Within the age-integrated environment, adults suggested that adult students were more often competitive and achievement-oriented in relation to younger students. These adults valued the variety of ages, viewpoints, and experiences in an age-integrated learning experience. On the other hand, adults in the age-segregated classrooms valued the all-adult classroom experience, particularly noted the valued contributions of adult workers' experiences and opinions related to the class material and their own current work roles.

The learning process for adult students was described in a variety of perspectives. Adult students suggested two differing perspectives on cognitive and classroom structures in learning. One group believed in learning of expert knowledge structures which guided their actions of classroom and study involvement. They defined their task as memorizing and recalling this expert knowledge. Another group viewed learning as making meaningful connections and thus drawing a broader circle of actions of classroom, adult life roles, and study/learning involvement. Most adults valued their life experiences in learning, but noted differing usages of those life experiences based upon these two perspectives of cognitive and classroom structures of learning. In addition to their inclusion or exclusion of life experiences in their learning process, adult students also reported a dual action perspective about learning and studying for the student role and for the adult learner role. In the first action perspective, adults conformed to the norms and expectations for a good college student and studied focused solely upon academic knowledge and classroom requirements. In the second action perspective, adult students focused their learning on personal interests and linked their past interests with current academic knowledge. For some students, these two perspectives were congruent in their acts as adult student learners; for other adults, these two were discrepant and conflictual. These adults created compartmentalization, a dichotomization, between the two kinds of learning and did not see the possibilities that learning could transcend context or initial intent of course goal or personal goal in learning. These actions were both constructed through adult beliefs of the college learning experience, as well as influenced by faculty lead engagements in classroom learning.

The adult students' past adult lives, educational experiences, and other adult roles significantly influenced their current involvement in college. It was evident that the college experience was different based upon both their own particular backgrounds as workers, family leaders, and world citizens, as well as their own internal cognitive and self development. Thus, as they spoke to learning and their related actions in the classroom experiences, they suggested differentiated and complex ways they judged knowledge, sources of knowledge, and efficacy of knowledge. Their current involvement in work, family, and other life roles did create important grounding and relevancy to their involvement in the classroom learning process. This learning also was viewed as knowledge and skill to improve their own families, work environments, communities, and the broader society.

TABLE 2
Categories, Themes, Beliefs and Actions of the Classroom Learning Experience by Adult Undergraduates

Key Categories	Lower-Division Students in Community College—Key Themes, Beliefs and Actions	Lower-Division and Upper-Division Students in Public Universities & Adult Degree Program in a Private Liberal Arts College—Charles College—Key Themes, Beliefs and Actions	Uniquely Structured Adult Degree Program in a Private Liberal Arts College—Allerton College—Key Themes, Beliefs, and Actions
Quality Couse instruction	Systematic, organized course work; Knowledgeable, organized, competent faculty; Preferred enthusiastic, committed faculty; Critical of part-time faculty; Valued personal student-faculty relations	Systematic, organized course work; Flexible & alternative forms of course organization (upper-division); Knowledgeable, organized, competent faculty; Preferred enthusiastic, committed, personable faculty; Critical of teaching assistants; Valued personal student-faculty relations; Critical of large classes; Value of smaller classes with adults (Charles)	Systematic, organized course Knowledgeable, organized, competent faculty; Preferred enthusiastic, committed, personable faculty; Critical of instructors without real-world experiences; Valued personal student-faculty relations; Value of small classes with adults; Desired efficiency in course presentation and outcome
Faculty and Adult Student Relationships	Respect and support of faculty; Faculty helpfulness in class learning; God-like belief about faculty for new entry adults; Faculty as accessible experts (continuing adult students); Partnership between faculty and adult students (select adults); Faculty held higher expectations for adults; Faculty valued adults life/work experiences	Respect and support of faculty; Openness to adult students; God-like belief about faculty (new entry adults); Faculty as accessible experts; Quasi-peer relationship with faculty; Partnership between faculty and adult students; Faculty held higher expectations for adults; Faculty valued adults in the classroom; Faculty valued adult life/work experiences; Negative impact of arrogant faculty	Respect and support of faculty; Openness to adult students; Partnership between faculty and adult students; Faculty valued adults in the classroom; Faculty valued adult life/work experiences
Creating a Connected Faculty Relationship	Creating a personal relationship through faculty helpfulness in classroom; Faculty understanding adult lives; Concern for equity and favoritism in classroom treatment	Creating a personal relationship with faculty in and out of the classroom; Necessity to create a special faculty relationship (Delta); Faculty understanding adult lives; Concern for equity and favoritism in classroom treatment	No comment about a connected relationship to instructors

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Nature of the Classroom Environment	Interactive participation and active teaching/learning strategies; Preferred faculty with interactive teaching style; Supportive, comfortable classroom; Motivational faculty; Valued a deliberate supportive class environment; Close class seating to instructor; Patterned and ritualized studying for student success	Interactive participation and active teaching/learning strategies; Preferred faculty with interactive teaching style; Supportive, comfortable classroom; Enthusiastic faculty; Valued an interactional learning community; Close class seating to instructor (lower-division); Seating based upon personal choice; Varied strategies of studying	Interactive participation and active teaching/learning strategies which are efficient; Preferred instructors with interactional learning community; Class seating based upon personal choice; Varied strategies of studying
Beliefs About Influence of Younger and Adult Fellow Students	Younger students made valuable classroom contributions; Enhanced learning through intergenerational sharing; Younger students often uncommitted, disrespectful, and unfocused on college goals; Adult students more competitive and achievement-oriented; Subtle dissonance with younger students because of adult orientation	Younger students made valuable classroom contributions; Enhanced learning through intergenerational sharing; Younger students often uncommitted and unfocused; Adult students more competitive and achievement-oriented; Subtle dissonance with younger students because of adult orientation; Valued adult students' contributions	Valued fellow adult worker's contributions; Valued the age-segregated learning experience
Influence of Cognitive and Classroom Structures on Learning	Learning of expert knowledge structures; Learning as making meaningful connections; Life experiences as additional meaning support	Learning of expert knowledge structures; Learning as making meaningful connections; Life experiences as additional meaning support and also the base for making new meanings of a theoretical and applied nature	Learning of expert knowledge structures; Learning as making meaningful connections; Problem of accelerated learning and meaningful understanding and retention
Use of Non-class Resources Supports	Engaging in varied strategies	Engaging a varied strategies	Limited strategies; predominant focus on class-related resources
Influences of Grades, Tests, and Program Structure	Varied beliefs of the influence of grades and testing	Varied beliefs of the influence of grades and testing	Impact of the program structure on the learning process
Meaning-making Connections Between Life Roles and Academic Knowledge	Value of connecting family, life roles and sometimes work roles to knowledge	Value of connecting all life roles to academic knowledge; Upper-division study more significantly influenced by work role	More significant connection between work role and academic content knowledge

Chapter 4

Adult Undergraduate Perspectives on Student Involvement

INTRODUCTION

Colleges and universities can make a difference in student lives. As suggested by Astin in his theory of involvement,

> True excellence lies in the institution's ability to affect its students and faculty favorably, to enhance their intellectual and scholarly development, and to make a positive difference in their lives. The most excellent institutions are, in this view, those that have the greatest impact—'add the most value,' as economists would say—on the student's knowledge and personal development. (1985, pp. 60-61)

This view of excellence has predominantly focused upon "student involvement" in the institutional context, linked to the amount of on-campus physical presence and direct participation within the college community. It also has focused upon on-campus activities—curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular—as they engage student involvement. For example, Boyer (1987, p. 180) suggested "the effectiveness of the undergraduate experience relates to the quality of campus life and is directly linked to the time students spend on campus and the quality of their involvement in activities."

This research study was also concerned about the relationship between adult undergraduate involvement and collegiate experiences and its possible impact upon students. However, these past beliefs regarding the nature of student involvement had created an untenable platform to consider adult undergraduates. By the very nature of adult life acted in the community, of multiple adult responsibilities outside of academe, and of significant past participation in schooling and learning experiences, these beliefs of undergraduate involvement characterized a perspective solely of the younger undergraduate student.

Why target a student's time and physical presence in relation to the concept of student involvement and educational gains? Why assume that the physical involvement in extracurricular activities on a college campus was a major determinant for student academic learning? Many higher educators had believed that the more campus-centered the life of an undergraduate, the more the student would gain from the college experience. These beliefs and assumptions represented a value hierarchy. The most preferred student was enrolled in full-time studies, had major leadership commitments related to the student role and was totally immersed in the collegiate environment. In this value hierarchy, part-time students and students who did not live on-campus or participate in extracurricular activities were less valued students and perceived to be impacted by the college in more limited ways.

This belief also reflected early theories of student development based upon anthropological notions of culture and change in life status (Sanford, 1962), as well as Van Gennep's "rite of passage" (Tinto, 1987). Thus, student involvement reflected a belief and preference for a high school graduate who moved from the biological family environment to the collegiate environment as a rite of passage into adult life. The collegiate environment became the cultural environment which socialized students to collegiate values, behaviors, and attitudes. From this way of thinking, there was a preference for total immersion into collegiate academic life and a belief that collegiate experiences were interwoven with movement from the dependency of youth to adult independence. These beliefs suggested that there should be no other major life responsibilities to "interfere" with the collegiate student/learner role and the developmental journey towards independent adulthood. In fact, most studies of undergraduate life assumed that the collegiate campus was the implicit parameter for a developmental "holding environment" for the undergraduate. Academic learning was viewed as the key task of undergraduate adult life, interwoven with young adult developmental tasks.

Adult undergraduate students represent an alternative perspective to these beliefs. Their presence on campus and their active pursuits of undergraduate studies challenge these broad assumptions. Adult students are diverse, representing more often part-time learners residing off-campus, who often work in full-time jobs, who supervise family households and raise children, who are engaged in citizen leadership roles in their communities, and who are committed to extremely complex adult lives (Kasworm, 1990a). If the quality of undergraduate education is directly related to "time and place" in the physical world of the campus and to a total life focus upon undergraduate work, adult students might well be inadequate for undergraduate student life. Yet the research on adult undergraduates suggests that adult students do have an equal, if not better, academic footing in the undergraduate world and have excelled in academic pursuits, alongside their younger peers. Past research has demonstrated that adult students are comparable, if not higher academic achievers, than younger undergraduates (Kasworm, 1980). Further, in select institutional studies (Kasworm, Pike, & Blinn, 1991), adult students in comparison to younger students have reported greater satisfaction with undergraduate academic life, as well as more positive interactions with faculty. If adult undergraduate educational outcomes could not be significantly influenced through on-campus involvement through full-time studies and collegiate extracurricular participation, what would be the key involvement influencers of educational outcomes?

Thus, this study re-investigated the concept of involvement and the adult student's perceptions of relationship with a collegiate institution. This study gathered adult students' images and beliefs about the nature of their collegiate institution and their experiences of involvement in three types of institutions—

public community colleges, public universities, and adult degree programs in private liberal arts colleges. This adult student involvement focused upon their rationale for selection and their valued connections with the institution, their projected beliefs about the nature of quality academic experiences, as well as their lived experiences of participation and involvement in the institution and the classroom.

As will be discussed in this chapter, the key beliefs of meaningful involvement for adult undergraduates focused upon the classroom experience, upon personal connectedness with the faculty, and upon the adult's academic learning journey. Unlike previous literature, most adult students were not concerned or involved with the young adult macrocosm of the college or university. The adult student's key goal was to learn, to become a competent and knowledgeable specialist, and to gain a college credential. However, in each institutional setting, adult students reported differing themes of involvement.

INVOLVEMENT FROM AN ADULT UNDERGRADUATE'S PERSPECTIVE

What was the nature of involvement for these adult undergraduates? Across the six institutional sites, five major categories influencing adult student involvement emerged:

1) involvement influenced by the adult value selection of institution and academic program;
2) involvement as an expression for a quality college education;
3) involvement focused on academic learning through the classroom;
4) involvement based in the adult learner support environment; and
5) involvement based on financial access.

As an overview, the following table presents each category, noting key themes within each category for adult undergraduates in community colleges, public universities and adult degree programs in private liberal arts colleges. Each key category with related institutional themes and additional unique supporting subthemes from each institutional setting (noted by italics) will be discussed in this chapter. Because of the diversity of the institutional sites and adult undergraduate students, each of these category themes, institutional themes, and supporting subthemes presented a particular perceptual lense used by these adults in making meaning of their involvement and action in a collegiate context. These concepts and beliefs of involvement reflected adult frameworks of judgement and experience as they pursued intellectual development and the ways in which they experienced the institution and the related impacts upon their lives.

Involvement Influenced by Adult Value Selection of Institution and Academic Program

Adult student involvement was grounded in a dialectic between the perceived environment of the institution and the initial projected impact of that collegiate environment upon the student. These adult undergraduates in the study had specific beliefs and expectations about their involvement in a collegiate institution that affected their selection. These beliefs about involvement were shaped by perceptions of the institution and the academic program, as well as institutional factors influencing their entry selection. In addition, these beliefs were based upon comparative judgements from either prior experiences with other institutions or experiences with the same institution in their earlier adult years.

TABLE 3
Categories and Themes of Involvement by Adult Undergraduates

Key Categories of Involvement	***Community College Themes of Involvement***	***Public University Themes of Involvement***	***Adult Degree Program in a Private Liberal Arts College Themes of Involvement***
Value Selection of Program and Institution	Academic opportunity to succeed	Importance and complexity of a university	Customized adult academic program
Desiring a Quality College Education	Current personal support and success & future success in 4-year college	Quality linked to prestige and academic demands	Reputation of college & support of adult academic requirements
Quality of Class Academic Learning	Learning focused on becoming competent in academic knowledge	Learning focused on expertise sharing and meaning development	Learning focused upon adult learners and their world
Adult Learner Support Environment	Particular attention and support for adults	Adapting to fit into the university in relation to adult learner contexts	Programs designed for adult life support environments
Key Financial Access Concern	Financial access and high personal costs	Financial access and high personal costs	Financial access for others and personal financial costs

Background Beliefs about Context of Institution

Adults who selected the community college valued it because it was psychologically comfortable and geographically closer to their current work and family environment. Some students spoke of a "stairstep" academic progression from community college to four-year institution. They purposefully selected a community college because it was more accessible, less expensive, less intimidating, more supportive, and a little bit less demanding. They also valued the community college because they believed it offered help for students who needed special academic attention.

Once these adults succeeded at a community college, they believed that they would survive and do well in their junior/senior years at a public university. Many valued the open access of the community college because they had dropped out of high school and gotten a GED, or because they had past academic difficulties. Others valued the community college as accepting them for what they were and helping them to be what they wanted to become. They believed that the major mission of the college was to be supportive of all students.

Adult undergraduates at the public university were usually more self-confident about their abilities to persist and to succeed at the university than were community college students. They chose the public university because they believed they should participate in an institution with greater prestige and reputation. They also wanted to participate in an academic environment which provided challenging, quality learning experiences, and one that offered a variety of specialized degrees. Since they viewed their involvement as sacrificing part of their lives for the degree pursuits, they wanted a degree that mattered. In making this choice, they often experienced a more difficult entry process. They were often faced with "fitting into" a dominant youth-culture and of meeting more demanding academic challenges in the classroom. They often reported that admissions and initial registration were more difficult and complicated for adult learners. These students met many demands for adaptation to the institutional structures. For example, some students pursued day-time only degree programs while also maintaining full-time work. Some students chose a degree program solely on the basis of its night-time availability, rather than attempt to pursue their preferred academic interests. They believed they could not modify their work environment to access day-time only courses. A few adults relocated to a particular region of the country and state solely on the basis of being able to access a particular curriculum and public institution.

Adult selection of an adult degree program at a private liberal arts college was associated with a more variable choice process. Adults were clearly drawn towards the tangible institutional commitment and the concept of an adult-oriented degree program. They valued the college's awareness and support for the adult and particularly the institutional support systems which expressly acknowledged that adult students had full-time jobs and significant family responsibilities. They viewed this environment as extremely supportive, helpful, and personalized. The majority also recognized that their access to a customized program was based on the availability of employer tuition reimbursement programs. Thus, they also saw a greater commitment by their company in their participation in an adult degree program. Some adults specifically chose the institution because of the degree program format. In the case of Allerton, which offered an accelerated degree program in a 15-month format, this design was a key attractor. These adults did not want to go through eight or more years of part-time involvement when they could get a degree in 15 months. The related use of portfolio assessment and the applied organizational management major also made involvement more relevant. For those who selected the adult college of a liberal arts institution (Charles College), other key attractors were academic reputation and commitment to a liberal arts orientation (even though they were pursuing a business-related degree major). They believed that a quality undergraduate degree was a liberal arts degree.

Unlike younger students, adults involved at all three types of institutions were usually place-bound by their adult life circumstances. Although these interviewed adults could potentially choose among a community college, a public university, and an adult degree program in a private liberal arts college, most had only considered their current institution. Few of the interviewed adults actively considered alternative colleges. Their choice of a college was often influenced by co-workers, family, friends who were participating or had participated in college, and occasionally other friends without a college background. In addition, many of the adults were influenced in their selection by past educational and academic experiences. For some adults, those past experiences were positive and therefore reinforced continuation in a similar type of institution. For others, past experiences with higher education had been negative. (These negative reports most often involved public universities.) A few students attempted to enroll in a public university but found that either their academic record or the attitude of college officials and admissions procedures made entry untenable. These past or current negative experiences created a stronger desire to look at the alternatives, usually the adult degree program at the private liberal arts college. It was evident that the adult perceptions of the nature of a particular institution and past experiences of enrollment influenced their selection and involvement.

Each of the adult student groups noted a key theme which distinguished their choice of a particular institution. In describing student involvement, these themes present differing images of the quality and kind of student involvement at that institutional setting. For the community college, the theme was often the valuing of the academic opportunity to succeed. For the public university, the theme was valuing the importance and the complexity of a university environment. And for the adult degree program in a private liberal arts college, there was a strong theme of valuing a customized academic program designed for adults.

Valuing the Academic Opportunity to Succeed

Adult students in a community college believed that this collegiate environment provided the opportunity to succeed. Many students couched this perspective in relation to their earlier lost opportunities, a current adult life of limited or repressive circumstances, their fear of potential inferior academic performance, or a desire for future opportunities to move up the economic and social ladder. These adults had experienced uneven high school academic achievement, significant time interruptions in past academic involvement, earlier financial hardships, or intimidation from an academically competitive and impersonal college environment. The community college was the gateway to future goals, which often included job security, higher status, a stronger valuing of self, or a more significant contribution to family and community. These adult students often voiced the belief that they were in an environment which would help create the opportunities to succeed. As stated by an Elmwood community college student,

> Students like myself, you wouldn't have given them a chance at a four year college. With my high school grades, I wouldn't have gotten in. They provided me a chance to prove myself. And it does the same thing for a lot of students that I've went to classes here with. It's a way to improve your study, your academic performance and a way to prove that you can do the work. That's a big thing, places like Elmwood have got going for them. They'll give anybody a chance.

As viewed by adult community college students, the opportunity to succeed was reflected in the *ease in admission to the institution and the related perceived psychological comfort of the environment.* Students valued the community college because it accepted a high school diploma or GED without concern about past academic performance. These adults could start off with a new beginning in academic work; they could get admitted and not be judged on past inadequate high school or college performance. Many of these adults were concerned about a more competitive and impersonal four-year collegiate environment. For example, when asked about transferring to upper-division work at a public university, an adult student noted, "It'll be different. The classes will be larger, I believe; and there will be less personal involvement between the students and the teacher" [Elmwood]. Another student reported,

> I am grateful for the opportunity that I've had here at Bayville and for the encouragement that I've had. I don't think that I would have done as well going to a large university campus...I just felt intimidated by it. But this gave me the alternative that I needed to get the confidence, so that going to Fremont University [transferring to upper-division work] no longer scares me.

Many believed that the opportunity to succeed began with *developmental studies and remediation for academic deficiencies.* In the case of Elmwood Community College, academic studies was presented as a set of seamless experiences between the remediation and the degree coursework. Although the students described being tested and being assigned remedial courses, they did not view these experiences as a separate component from their academic coursework. They saw it as the important first step in their academic involvement. However, students at Bayville Community College spoke to a clear delineation between the developmental studies program and academic coursework. They spoke of working to remediate deficiencies, and of valuing the study skills course component in that program. One student who valued the experience noted, "Oh, I'd have been lost if they had placed me in regular [classes]—well, at first it was like embarrassing. It was like 'Oh, no I'm going all the way back...this is basically not even high school math.' But I needed that to come forward to where I am now...I've already had calculus and I'm in stats now" [Bayville]. In fact, a few students reported choosing Bayville because they would be tested for basic skills.

> She [student's wife] suggested that I go to Bayville, which turned out to be the proper choice, because they gave me the pretesting of AAPP test

> [Academic Achievement Placement Program, a test of basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics]....So it was a good choice because of the developmental courses...And [it] got me back into shape in my mathematical skills, [and] back into shape in my writing skills. And then after a semester of developmental courses, I was ready for college level courses.

Not all students at Bayville valued being placed in developmental courses. Several perceived these requirements as holding them back from pursuing their desired academic coursework. "It cost me time and at my age I don't have as much as some people do...I felt like I needed a review, but I was wasting time too. I had mixed feelings about it." In essence, some individuals believed that remedial studies made it more difficult for them to succeed, because it increased the required length of time to participate in college studies.

Valuing the Importance and Complexity of a University Environment

A key belief of adult undergraduates at the public university settings was the importance of a university. In particular, they valued a university because of its specialization and complexity. It offered special curricula and a more diverse environment which meet individual career specialization requirements. Many of these students particularly valued the specialized academic programs which could only be offered at a larger university. These adults also valued the university experience because it provided a *rich diversity and variety of experiences*. As noted by one Delta University full-time student, "I just wanted to be part of a public university. I just wanted to be part of that system. There were more people here; there's more activities; there's more action. There's just more things being stirred up. And I just wanted to be in the middle of all of that."

Because of this complexity, adult undergraduates accepted as a norm that *the university environment would present a series of hurdles and problems* for them to overcome. In particular, they expected that initial entry or reentry might be problematic. Because they were not younger adults coming out of high school, they expected that there would be difficulties with admissions and with transfer of prior coursework from other institutions. Several students noted some initial special procedure or policy which aided them in being admitted. At Delta, one student noted that he was admitted after review by a special committee for admissions which considered life accomplishments. A second student noted he came in with a probationary status, requiring he complete 18 hours with a C average for regular admission. At Fremont, several students commented on their initial contact with the Evening School, feeling that this contact facilitated an easier transition into the university. "I came back through the night school, because I was familiar with it. I had even broached to them about perhaps going to a community college or something; and they sent me to a counselor and I went and spoke with her [and decided to come directly to Fremont]." At Fremont University, there were special admission policies and procedures which influenced adult entry. The ACT entrance requirement was waived for individuals who had not been enrolled in college for three or more years. Also adult students could use the Academic Second Opportunity policy, which allows reentry students with previous academic coursework below a C average to petition that prior coursework would not be computed into their current academic record.

Beyond the initial issues of the entry process, these adult students also assumed that *university bureaucracy was a part of the student life.* These adult students had a belief that participating in a university would be a complex and, at times, a difficult experience. Adult students often believed they demonstrated greater patience and persistence in working with policies and procedures, working with the university system as a bureaucracy. Because these adults had participated in the work world, they often expressed an understanding and sympathy for institutional procedures and personnel. Many of these students reported their own strategies to succeed in a university environment. As one Fremont student noted, "You network. That's the number one. You've got to network and you get around people that had,...somebody before who had done it wrong and got screwed, so you have to learn, you know, what's happened so that you won't make the same mistake. It's all networking." Or as one Delta student reported,

> If they say you can't do something or something cannot be done, after a while—if you are aware—you find out things can be done. The campus police and their parking tickets... But I think they go under the assumption, like so many places do, that people are going to take the easy way out and they would rather pay ten dollars then write up something. I haven't completely figured out a way to beat this registration process here, but there's got to be a way it can be done.

At both public universities, students also linked their respective state economic recessions with the inability of the university to offer a better environment, with more courses, more personnel, and more facilities. They believed that a part of the university's difficulty in responding to their needs was directly related to cutbacks in state funding. As reported by one Fremont student,

> And I see that although they're trying to address a lot of areas, more than say a smaller college would, they're also limited in funds and personnel and equipment...and some of the labs and stuff. They don't have the equipment...because they've got so many people. It's just a volume of people here. And the diversity of stuff they're trying to, you know, cover...And the resources are spread thin, like they are everywhere [because of the cutbacks].

Students often found initial difficulties in understanding and *making sense of these highly distinct academic units, procedures and processes* within the university. Such activities as registration, complex requirements and directions in the course catalog, financial aid, specialized academic tasks, and different offices for specialized services were all unknown territory. As an example of this anxiety, one Fremont student reported, "I'm intimidated by the library. I've never known—I've never been taught how to use a library and so I'm really intimidated." Many adults noted initial intimidation and anxiety about entering into the university and interacting with various offices and personnel. These fears were most pronounced for first-time entry students, for reentry students who had had a long interruption between their academic enrollments, and for reentry students who had not been successful in their earlier academic pursuits. These adults often did not know what would be expected, what were the correct things to do in this environment, and which offices they needed to contact concerning specific procedures. As suggested by one Fremont student,

> When an individual doesn't know what's expected of them, they don't know how to act. It's frightening. And it scares them and they do strange things...Now I know, I was a returning student. But I knew what I was doing, cause I had been exposed to it before...I knew some of the rules. But some of these people who hadn't had any college background didn't know what they were doing.

Many of these newly entering adult students did not want to appear as if they did not know what a "student should know" about both the institution and the academic process. They were extremely self-conscious, often judging themselves against interactions with personnel and students. They were often extremely sensitive to cues suggesting that they did not "fit in." They were fearful that they might be shown to be stupid or inferior in this environment. Some of these fears directly reflected entering a unique cultural organization [a university] with a highly complex set of degree programs, service units, and related specialized sub-communities. They also viewed the university as the superior academic institution, which had a stricter standard for judgement of students and student performance. Many reported initial fears of class performance until feedback from the first tests or papers, and from feedback by faculty and fellow students about their comparable abilities in the classroom. Many vividly reported receiving positive feedback and assurances during their initial semester of entry work. They often valued the letter grades, more so than the personal feedback during this entry/reentry period. Within the first two semesters, most of these adult students had made the transition into the culture and these initial anxieties had dissolved. With a successful transition, most adults perceived themselves as different, yet also comparable, in meeting the academic standards of the university.

Valuing the Customized Academic Program Just for Adults

For adults in adult degree programs at private liberal arts colleges, there was a unique key theme focused upon the value of the academic program specifically designed for adults. They believed that this adult degree program was an important affirmation of the worth and value of adult students in the undergraduate environment. These adults judged the customized program and structures as reflecting a *commitment by the private college to adult students.* These adults believed that through this program and services, the *college demonstrated caring support, sensitivity, efficiency, and individualized attention to adults.* Students continually noted the value of these qualities in their interactions with college personnel and within the classroom. As suggested by one Charles student,

> And then just moving through the pipeline here—through admissions and then registration, and then taking the classes—I saw...how well it'll work..It was set up for that. It was easier for me to stay involved in the academics, the program was structured to suit me. The professors understood, admissions understood, the Coordinator of the Adult Alternative College understood, the administrators, they understood, [and they all understood] the other time constraints. There was the sort of unspoken bond...we're all in this together. Because the other students here, they also work and most of them are degree candidates. So there was a lot more support, external support that prompted me to stay on.

As these adults made comparisons with other academic programs and institutions, they believed that institutional commitment to the adult student by the private liberal arts college was very important. They often described other higher educational institutions as "traditional," oriented to the younger adult. This sense of being in a different kind of program was only part of their perspective. They also believed that these adult degree programs were created to help adults get their college degree, while other collegiate institutions and academic programs forced them to participate as if they were younger students who had no major responsibilities or commitments. They viewed these other institutions and their structures and processes of academic participation as a major deterrent for adult access and completion of a college degree. As noted by a student from Charles College, "What I found here that I thought was real positive was that just the whole atmosphere that was created for people that couldn't attend the traditional school or school during traditional hours. And that was very comforting, that was very encouraging. You know, I felt that they did understand."

These adults valued having a special program and a special set of adult support mechanisms. However, this special institutional commitment to a unique degree program for adults was also viewed as a paradox by some students. For students at Charles College, they believed that there should be visible actions and efforts in acknowledging and praising the value of adult students as part of the academic community. They perceived that younger students were given more attention, more resources, and more preference in the college.

> We know we're different than everybody else here. But you read it [college publications which go to students, alumni, and others] and there's no mention of the Adult Alternative College...So there's sort of...we're off to the side. We're the cash cow, or whatever...The Adult Alternative College students feel that the administration ignores them.

This subgrouping of students believed that they were an asset to the college, but the college did not recognize them as an integral part of their community. Some believed that there were few serious efforts to engage adults in adult appropriate activities and relationships which bonded them closer to the college. Other students noted publications, honors, and public media which spoke to only the top younger students in the college and younger student activities within the academic community.

> It's kind of, without actually being said, it's kind of set up to where the adult students are adults, so they [believe that you] don't need as much recognition—[for example] you know there was no valedictorian for the Adult Alternative College. Some of the pomp and circumstance activities which features college achievements and those type of things....I think it's important to adult students.

A few students talked about the lack of interaction by the college with the employer community. Most of the adults in the private college adult degree program were supported by employer tuition programs, yet the college did not view employers as important partners in this collegiate process. These students believed this disinterest was a lack of college commitment to working adult students and a lack of institutional recognition of the importance of the work environment. Some adults believed that college administrators did not realize they needed to value adults for their academic work as it linked to work, family, and citizen involvement.

In contrast, the Allerton students who pursued their degree program at an off-campus site did not speak to any general perceptions about the university administration. A number of students did note awareness of the efficiency and helpfulness of the institution in serving them as they went rapidly through their degree program.

Summary of Key Themes and Subthemes of the Involvement Influenced by Adult Value in Selection of Institution and Academic Program

Adult undergraduate students expressed a variety of beliefs and actions in their selection and in related beliefs about a particular institution and academic program. Adult students in the community college noted the key theme of **Valuing the academic opportunity to succeed** which guided their involvement. Within this theme, they noted two key subthemes: 1) ease in admission to the institution and the related perceived psychological comfort of the environment, and 2) viewing success beginning with developmental studies and remediation for academic deficiencies. Adults in the public university noted the key theme of **Valuing the importance and complexity of a university environment** as their guiding belief influencing their involvement. Within this institutional context theme were noted four key subthemes: 1) valuing the diversity and variety of experiences, 2) viewing the university environment as representing a series of hurdles and problems, 3) assuming that university bureaucracy was a part of the student life, and 4) making sense of the highly distinct academic units, procedures and processes of a university. Adult students in an adult degree program at a private liberal arts school report the key theme of **Valuing the customized academic program designed for adults** as their guiding belief in involvement. Two subthemes were noted within this institutional context theme: 1) valuing the commitment by the private college to adult students, and 2) believing that the college was caring, supportive, sensitive, and efficient, and that it gave individualized attention to adults.

Involvement Focused upon a Desire for a Quality Education

A key theme for most adult students was their judgements of quality college education. Beliefs about quality institution-specific education were focused upon both their institutional experiences of perceived quality in relation to their success, as well as perceived external judgements of their institutional educational experience.

Quality as Current Personal Support and Success, as well as Projected Future Success in a Four-year College

The adult students in the community college suggested a set of mixed perspectives about the academic reputation and the quality of instruction of the institution. Quality of education was judged by their own beliefs and observations at the college; by their own comparative judgements between other previous and current college experiences; by public discussions of communicated reputation by family, friends, and co-workers; and by the institution's own regional advertisement. Those individuals who had previously attended other institutions held both complimentary and critical perspectives of their current institution. First-time attendees tended to be more generic and uncritical in their praise and personal beliefs about the college environment.

Adult community college students viewed *quality education through personal support and success.* They believed that community college instructors and the community college environment were excellent, because of personable understanding and supportive efforts towards adult students. They linked the belief that they had done well in their academic course work with the supportive environment of the community college. Thus, quality learning was related to being successful in understanding the class materials, gaining good grades, and proceeding through the curriculum in an effective manner through the support and assistance of community college faculty and staff.

On the other hand, these adult undergraduate students had mixed perspectives about the academic reputation of a community college as it related to the quality of their college education. As individuals who were sacrificing their own financial and energy resources, they wanted to have an excellent educational experience, as recognized by others in the academic world and the public in the community. When they spoke to the institutional academic reputation, they noted their concern for their own future *ability to be academically competitive in a four-year institution.* These concerns were related to their projected transfer to a four-year school, and how they would "fit" into a more competitive academic environment. They had evidence that their academic abilities were judged to be adequate to superior by the community college; yet they feared that the standards at the community college might be lower than academic standards at the four-year college. They worried that the quality of their community college academic experience would place them at a disadvantage at the four-year college. In addition, there were some adult community college students who purposefully chose a community college as their entry or reentry point, because they believed they would not have been admitted to a university. They viewed the community college as a validating step towards future admission and acceptance by a university. They desired assurances that they would be academically successful in their upper-division work at a university.

Institutional academic standards and institutional reputation for these adult undergraduates had powerful meanings and projected consequences for these adults. On the one hand, they valued the ease of access and open-door entry of the community college. They valued the ability to start with rusty academic skills and uneven past academic coursework. They valued the supportive engagement of the faculty and community college to help them succeed. On the other hand, these same valued qualities suggested to them that there may be lesser standards used in judging academic performance at the community college. "But my only concern, has been—I hope—that the competition here has been such that I will be able to compete wherever I end up" [Bayville]. "I assume that the quality of the...education I'm getting here would be applicable to most any school, save that of maybe the most elite. But I have nothing to gauge that by, just by reputation" [Elmwood]. Other students observed the current environment as a testing ground to weed out the uncommitted student (usually referring to the younger student). As observed by an Elmwood student,

> The student body here varies a lot....you can sit in the parking lot and at the beginning of a quarter the parking lot will be full. By the end of the quarter, it's easy to find a parking space. I think a lot of people come to school here before they take on a real school—a real tough university—to see how well they'll do or to see how much they'll really like going into a higher education program. You know, a lot of people decide they don't like it. It's not for them.

Some suggested that the community college should consider either admissions screening or a probationary period. They believed for the adult student to be academically competitive, they needed to be with students who were also academically comparable to a four-year institution. As one Bayville student noted,

> I would like to see them change their admissions standards. I guess, because it's a public institution, they basically have to let anybody in for a little while. I think maybe they ought to shorten up the time that they have to keep them. Because if you don't want to be here,...I feel like anybody whose wasting time here is encroaching on my time. I don't feel like they—they don't have a right to do that.

Several students believed there should be a more efficient and challenging course sequence for adult students; they wanted several levels of courses based on students' academic background, such as advanced courses for students who could excel beyond the normal demands of a regular community college course. Because of the spectrum of student abilities (and often young student lack of commitment) in the college, some adult students reported boredom and had a more limited learning experience in their classes. They desired more challenging courses. As noted by one student, " There should be more opportunities for students that come to the classroom better prepared—not to have to be backtracking with those who aren't prepared. And [as] I said, there's a low common denominator here....I'd like to see more opportunities for better, more advanced learners here" [Elmwood].

Because of a dominant concern for comparable academic quality as well as a concern for efficiency of program planning, most students highly valued the *safety net of institutional agreements for academic program articulation* with nearby four-year schools. These articulation agreements were mentioned more often at Elmwood than Bayville, probably because there was a greater number of alternative choices for four-year schools in the Elmwood region. Articulation agreements were also an important topic by adult students at both institutions who had previously attempted to transfer coursework from another collegiate institution. As one student noted, "X Community College would have been closer, but they don't offer Associates of Science, and all their courses are not accepted by Delta University... [I] interview[ed] with them [Delta U.]; they said they accepted more course credits [from] here, than they do [from X Community College]." These students valued the security of the transfer agreement. They also valued not wasting their time or money on lower-division community college courses which did not meet the four-year institution's curriculum requirements. This desire for security and efficiency was also reflected in student comments about the college catalog. They viewed the course catalog as not sufficiently specific and clear regarding program articulation agreements with particular institutions. Although a student could follow the catalog and complete a particular associate degree program, that program did not assure the student access and transfer of hours directly into a specific curriculum at a four-year institution. These students believed that the published degree program requirements were somewhat misleading. They believed it was the responsibility of the community college to work with the student to establish a clear understanding of program articulation and course transfer to four-year colleges. They wanted the community college to assist the student with a "game plan" which fit the community college and the four-year institution coursework together. They believed that students were ill-advised if the community college counselor only focused upon the internal curriculum and did not also help the student to view the alternative course requirements based upon differing four-year institutional requirements.

At Bayville, a number of adult students were concerned about the quality of their education because of the extensive use of part-time instructors. They believed that part-time instructors could mean lesser academic quality. There were also related concerns that adult students' time and energy would be wasted with a "know-nothing" degree. Several of these adults had previously experienced unaccredited degree programs or technical degree programs. They discovered, upon entering an accredited institution and a college-transfer program, that their prior course work would not count towards their current degree pursuits. Because of these past experiences, they were concerned about the validity of these current courses in a new four-year academic environment. It was also very evident that Elmwood's public relations campaign emphasizing their national ranking had a clear influence on the belief system of Elmwood community college students.

Students often cited the national ranking as proof of the "reputation" of their community college and therefore indicative of quality education.

Quality Linked to University Prestige and Academic Demands

Adult undergraduates at public universities presented key beliefs and expectations of a university's academic quality and reputation, particularly of the quality of their in-progress educational experiences. These beliefs and expectations significantly influenced their sense of connectedness and involvement with the university. In essence, they judged part of the *worth and quality of their college education in relation to the perceived prestige and status of the attending institution.* A number of these students purposefully chose a university (as opposed to a four-year or community college), because they believed they would have a better learning experience. They also believed that the academic program would be more demanding. Most believed that a university degree was more prestigious and therefore offered a higher quality college degree. Their perceptions of themselves in the university environment were also influenced by their beliefs about the comparable status of the institution in relation to other universities within the state and the nation.

A subgroup of these students *linked their struggles in getting admitted and in the course work with the assumed "quality" and "reputation" of the degree.* In essence, if getting admitted and if doing academic work was a struggle and was demanding, it was because the quality of the educational experience was superior. These ideas were most often expressed by adult students who were full-time students and who had put their personal and professional lives on hold to pursue the degree. These ideas were also often expressed by those students who were in their lower-division work in the university and who believed that they were experiencing a higher standard of course demands in comparison to a community college involvement.

Because these adult undergraduates believed they were student members of a more prestigious and academically competitive environment, there were several related beliefs about how students carried out that relationship and involvement. One perspective reflected students who had either inadequate academic backgrounds or rusty skills causing them initial problems in their academic course work. These adults recognized that they had to *measure up to the standards of this academically competitive environment.* Most students accepted their own limitations and the assumed discrepancy between their current academic deficiencies and the higher-level expectations of the environment. They worked doggedly to gain competence for excelling in college work. This focus on succeeding as a college student often was reflected in initial seeking out of support resources within their university and within their personal spheres of relationship, including family, co-workers, and friends. They also developed a personal set of theories about how to be successful in the university environment. These personal theories reflected stylized notions of time management, work/family negotiated relationships, study-related attitudes and actions, and beliefs about "being a successful student." At both universities, some of these students reported using the nearby community college for part of this assistance. As stated by one Fremont student, "The class I'm taking at Y Community College is a basic math. I was kind of deadlocked here. I couldn't really go any further in my major classes until I got my math skills up to par." Other resources used to develop adequate academic skills included use of prerequisite courses in the beginning of their program to identify needed knowledge and skill to be successful. In addition, some students purposefully went back to earlier course work or high school texts to "re-learn" background coursework [most often done in math and science areas]. More often, students reported heavy usage of feedback from tests, papers, and faculty conversations to designate personal goals towards development of background academic knowledge and course study skills. A few individuals used tutoring support through friends, a class group, or a paid tutor.

Another subgroup of students came with high expectations for a more academically competitive and prestigious environment and were disappointed in the lesser standards of instruction and academic experiences in the university. These students often presented more critical selective comments about the academic experience. As stated by a Fremont student about the university experience, "It's positive fact that it's a large university; it's well known, it's got a good reputation. I'm still somewhat disappointed being here and hearing about it so long and then actually seeing it. I see, you know—there's a disparity between...what I've heard about the education and what I feel like I'm getting." These students were critical of inferior faculty who did not do an outstanding job of instruction or of courses that did not have full professors as instructors. These students directly linked quality of their educational experiences with full professors in their classroom, with smaller size classes, with intellectually stimulating courses, and with adequate instructional facilities and resources.

Quality Related to Reputation of College and to Support of Adult Academic Needs

Although there was a dominant belief that a private liberal arts college offered a quality education, the *reputation of the institution* was an important element in the adult student involvement in adult degree programs in private liberal arts colleges. Charles College students continually reported the importance of the reputation of Charles as an important aspect of their education. "Charles certainly has an excellent reputation in the community." There was a clear belief that the quality of learning experiences was directly connected to the quality of the institution. At Allerton, the adult students expressed mixed opinions about the academic reputation. Most believed that Allerton had a quality education and reputation. However, some of the individuals compared the college to the major public university and felt that it was not as well known and therefore not as prestigious. "Personally, I would rather have a degree with Fremont University or something else printed on it. Allerton doesn't have a reputation; I mean I don't think it has a negative reputation, I hope not; but it has no reputation." Allerton students also expressed some concerns about community perceptions of the adult degree program due to its accelerated curriculum and use of a portfolio assessment. As reported by an Allerton student about her interactions with others about the program,

> I'd heard from several other people I worked with; they had talked about Allerton and the program here. And I had heard some good things and some bad things about it. The bad things that I heard were from people who had never been a student here. They had said, 'Oh you, know that's one of these—you pay your money and they give you diploma-type deals. And then I started listening close. It kind of discouraged me. Then I started listening to the people who actually came here. And noticing them and they were all talking about how hard they had to study and how they couldn't do this and they couldn't do that, because they had to write this paper or they had to study for this test. And I determined that these other people really didn't know what they were talking about at all.

Students in adult degree programs at private liberal arts colleges were directly attracted to the adult degree program because it was *customized to meet a variety of their adult life needs.* Thus, they saw a direct link between the reputation for quality of a liberal arts college and the created adult program and support services which provided a quality education to part-time, working adults. At Allerton, they all valued the program because it was structured for a 15-month involvement with the college degree at the end of that given length of time. However, many Allerton adult students faced issues of quality of learning in relation to the pace of the accelerated curriculum. One of the key attractions to the Allerton program was the accelerated curriculum; however, Allerton students found that the accelerated pace was also a detriment to their learning. Some students were able to adjust to the nature of the program. They learned how to reorganize and manage their lives, how to absorb the fast-paced presentation of information, and how the "system" worked. However, some students had learning difficulties with this format and pace.

> The negative is in such a fast pace that a lot of times you don't absorb as much material as you [would] like. I think that is the only real negative thing...Some of it we covered so fast that, you know, you just don't retain that much of it. The slower pace, like Fremont University, would be much better for retention. But you know, when you get older you don't have that much time to spend... they [his employer] wanted me to work and go to Fremont U and get a metallurgist degree. And it was going to take me 8 years, and I didn't have 8 years.

Both of these adult student groups also *valued and judged academic experiences in relation to broader application to their work and lives.* Allerton students expected and reported that they could use their in-class activities directly with their work environments. Although Charles students also noted some connection and applications of course knowledge to their work lives, several also valued their liberal arts elective courses providing broader understandings of their world and their lives beyond the work environment.

Summary of Key Themes in Designing a Quality College Education

Each of the institutional contexts reported key themes focused upon a quality college education. The adult students in the community college reported the key theme of **Quality as Current Personal Support and Success, as well as Projected Future Success in a Four-year College** as a guiding theme of involvement. Three subthemes were noted in this discussion: 1) quality education through personal support and success from the community college, 2) ability to be academically competitive in a four-year institution, and 3) value of a safety net of institutional agreements for academic program articulation. The adult students in the public university reported the key theme of **Quality Linked to University Prestige and Academic Demands** as a guiding theme of involvement. These adults voiced three subthemes related to this general theme: 1) worth and quality of their college education in relation to the perceived prestige and status of the attending institution, 2) the linking of their struggles in getting admitted and in the course work with the assumed "quality" and "reputation" of the degree, and 3) concerns for measuring up to the standards of this academically competitive environment. Adult students in adult degree programs in private liberal arts colleges reported the key theme of **Quality Related to Reputation of College and to Support of Adult Academic Needs** as their guiding theme of involvement related to seeking out a quality college education. Three subthemes were identified: 1) concern for the reputation of the institution, 2) valuing the customized program which would meet a variety of their adult life needs, and 3) valuing and judging academic experiences in relation to broader application to their work and lives.

Involvement Focused on Quality of Classroom Academic Learning

Adult students believed that the most important part of their student existence was focused upon academic learning and on those activities and relationships directly related to the classroom experience. However, each institutional site revealed different vantage points in relation to this central category theme. At all sites, there were some adults who saw their involvement solely from gaining a credential; often this was an entry belief that changed as they continued in their involvement. Most adults entered both to experience a collegiate education and to participate in an academic journey towards a new career or a necessary credential validation for continuance in a career. Many reported that college had made them a different person. For some, the college classroom experience had encouraged increased self-confidence and stronger self-worth. For others, it had helped them strengthen their sense of self-identity. Many of these adults saw their development creating a strong ethos in lifelong commitments to learning, even though some entered degree work as "lifelong learners." Most believed that they had become "addicted" to learning throughout their lives. Of significance, many adult students reported plans to continue in future formal educational pursuits of baccalaureate, master's or doctoral programs. Approximately 33% of the interviewed adult community college students had plans for graduate school; 50% of adults in public universities and 58% of adults in private liberal arts adult degree programs reported commitments to pursue graduate work.

Learning Focused on Becoming Competent in Academic Knowledge

Community college adults viewed involvement through the mirror of entering a new world or of continuing their journey in academic learning. They came into the community college to understand and becoming competent in academic knowledge. They *believed that there was a special kind of knowledge and understanding at a college;* and they came to become part of that unique set of learning experiences. In addition, some viewed this involvement as a progression towards further course work targeted to vocational/career competencies. Many saw the journey as a preparation for future involvement at a four-year college and for a more comprehensive understanding of themselves and their world. Many of these adults appreciated the opportunity to engage in collegiate learning and were thankful for accessing classes, as well as receiving special help through developmental/remedial studies. They wanted a quality educational experience that was supportive of their own evolving and, at times, fragile identities. They particularly valued quality instructors who were committed to helping them learn and understand the world of academic knowledge.

Part of the academic knowledge for these adults was the development of a world view. A unique theme of a subgrouping of adult community college students was the *valuing of diverse students in the community college.* Adult students reported the specific value of meeting and interacting with diverse students from other backgrounds, nationalities, and belief systems. Many of the adults in the community college noted benefits and sometimes detriments to the learning environment of these diverse individuals. At both colleges, adult students noted the valued diversity of cultures in the student body, with the Elmwood environment more often noted as providing multicultural interactions.

> That's one of the fun things about this school, you have the whole spectrum. You've got the people, you know, who are going to be going to law school and then you've got students here, also that they're just taking this course for fun. There's just all kinds of people here. I've seen Arabs, I've seen people from Nigeria. I've seen people from Armenia at this school. You know, this school has got it all.

These adult students valued the opportunities to interact and learn from these individuals. "At Bayville you have...a lot of international students and it's really rewarding to get to meet new students from other parts of the world."

This interaction of isolated backgrounds with more diverse cultures and value-orientations presented difficulty for some students. Two African-American adult students noted past experiences of racial prejudice and insensitivity in the community college environment. Also many students raised concerns about students [usually younger undergraduate students] who were uncommitted to college, who did not actively engage in their course work, or who slowed down the progress of the course by their lack of out-of-class preparation. They sometimes spoke to these differences as a sub-grouping with a particular set of beliefs and behaviors representing a particular student culture. Thus, the diversity offered a broadening of cultural awareness. It also created some difficulties for adults who may have experienced prejudice through a lack of cultural sensitivity or experienced frustration through an academic classroom experience filled with uncommitted and unprepared younger students.

Diversity for these students was not only an awareness of other cultures. A subgrouping of adults also noted *recognition of the adult's own diverse life experiences in the classroom.* They believed, particularly after experiencing success in the academic world, that they also brought valuable insights and understanding from their past experiences. This desired recognition of their own experiential diversity featured faculty valuing adult life experiences in classroom discussions, as well as its value for younger students. These adults also reported that their learning was often enhanced by their diverse past life experiences. They believed that these experiences not only aided them in better learning, but also could be used to aid others in understanding concepts and applications. Several students believed these rich past experiences should be recognized by the community college. Several suggested that their college should actively engage in the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and in some form of portfolio assessment for life experiences. They believed that these national programs of life experience assessment should be part of the community college, because some of the adult students in the community college had held significant work positions prior to entering college. These assessment mechanisms could provide recognition of the learning achieved during past involvement in work and life experiences, as well as expedite a portion of their collegiate study requirements.

Learning Focused on Sharing of Mutual Expertise and Development of Meanings

Adults at the university viewed involvement in academic learning from a perspective of being in the middle of both a life and an academic journey; they knew they had relevant past experiences and competencies. Therefore they viewed academic learning from shared expertise between academic and life experiences, as well as the development of broader meanings and understandings beyond their current expertise knowledge. They saw themselves as preparing for upgraded careers or graduate work; therefore, they believed they brought special motivation and expertise into the classroom. They reported a more discriminating desire about the kinds of learning and kinds of outcomes they had in comparison to younger undergraduates. If they were in career change or new career entry, they believed that they were able to often act on their learnings in the classroom while concurrently pursuing outside activities to enhance their new knowledge and expertise development. They often expressed more refined and specialized interests in their academic involvement, as well as projections for future goals, because most had prior higher education experiences. These adults often spoke to connections and applications between their college work and their business/family activities and to actively transferring knowledge and understanding between these varied role settings.

Adult students at a university focused their involvement upon academic classroom activities. They wanted both the very best from the institution, as well as from themselves in this academic learning process. They judged the quality of the learning experiences through the rank of the instructors (full professors were viewed to be better quality, and teaching assistants were viewed to be of lesser quality). They also judged the quality of the learning experiences through faculty-created classrooms with informative, stimulating learning; and through desirable interactive classroom relationships with faculty. They honored top-caliber faculty who were both knowledgeable and personally interactive with adults in the classroom learning activities.

These students presumed that the *key to involvement in academic learning was the faculty members.* Thus, they wanted effective learning experiences through those relationships. Although most adult students did not necessarily desire a personal relationship with the faculty member, they did want to be personally known to the faculty member and have the faculty member understand them as adults. They chose the university because it offered a rich variety of academic experiences and faculty. They valued the opportunity to participate and become involved with a diversity of faculty who would help them see and act on the world in a new variety of meaningful ways. This involvement with faculty was viewed as having a personal interaction with someone who had certain expert opinions and knowledge in relation to one's own knowledge and experience background.

When asked to speak about the institution, most of the students at the university reported specific comments on the value of the faculty, the curriculum, and the learning experiences. Unlike adult students in the community college or the private liberal arts college, they rarely spoke to broad generalized beliefs about the institution. Rather, their involvement with a public university focused predominantly upon their *personal experiences in the classroom and their journey through the curriculum.* They spoke to richly stimulating intellectual and academic pursuits with specific faculty members and courses, and particularly of those learning experiences and course objectives which were not "time-wasters." One Delta student, in comparing previous experiences with the community college, noted, "The positive experiences were actually, as I said, I would relate to the professors, the teachers quite well. The classes were a little more demanding, I liked that a lot, a little more challenging." In this same perspective, these students voiced strong concerns about large classes, ineffective TA's, burnt-out or uninterested faculty, forced enrollments in large classes, and other aspects that reflected inferior quality or impersonalization of that learning environment. They saw themselves in a high-stakes life involvement and expected the highest commitment from both themselves and the university. They came to gain expertise and also to be recognized for their own expertise as an adult.

Learning Focused upon Adult Learners and their World

Adults enrolled in the adult degree program valued its commitment and focus on adult learners. Such programs invited involvement through relevant adult learning experiences and through smaller and more participatory classes. They also experienced instructors who were both knowledgeable of academic theory and of work applications; these students valued faculty who were able to take academic knowledge and relate it to the adult world of understanding and action. As noted in the following paragraphs, there were a number of unique elements of the involvement in the academic learning theme for adult students enrolled in private liberal arts colleges in adult degree programs.

Involvement in quality academic learning focused upon *relevant and personalized learning experiences.* Adults were highly complimentary in both adult degree programs about relevant collegiate instruction focused on adult learners. These students believed that learning was more collegial when every person in the class shared their expertise; the faculty member offered guidance and direction; and fellow class members offered their own insights and described work-related applications.

> Here everybody feels like they are on the same level. I especially like the facilitators [instructors] of the classes, because they are quite often from the type of work—they do the type of work they teach. So they not only have the textbook experience, but they have the everyday experience that they can offer. And they can relate to you. It just seems like so much, it is so much more supportive. It is just so much more personable than a regular classroom situation. [Allerton]

Students valued the *smaller classes and the participatory nature of the class sessions.* Many students believed that the smaller size of the class was a significant part of a quality education.

> I like the small classroom situation. I just feel like I get so much more. I feel like I am really getting my money's worth. I feel like what I have to say is something that they value and they think about. I mean I get feedback. It is just a much more personal experience. Right or wrong, I get feedback. And I am wrong a lot and that is fine. But in a large class you don't know that. So you go on just the way you were, thinking you are just fine. [Allerton]

Adult classes were believed to be specifically designed for examination of alternative perspectives. Because of the participatory quality of the learning, students also gained a new appreciation of the content in relation to different contextual applications in a diversity of work conditions. This appreciation for work context was very evident in the Allerton program.

> And everybody in my class is very diverse. We've got a fellow who's a construction contractor, and we've got a woman who is like a secretary to a government agency, and another woman who is a marketing administrator, and a fellow who sells furniture. And so, everybody comes from a different place, but we are all able to take the same information and apply it to what we are doing.

Most of these adult students believed that the environment provided opportunities for making *personal connections with other students.* These connections within the quality academic learning experiences were greatly valued at both a personal and at a professional level. Many of the students noted that these opportunities for collegial friendships did not occur at other higher education institutions.

> By the classes being smaller here at Charles, I am able to—well the students get more involved with each other—so that's one of the good things, too, being in a smaller class. At Delta University, once they're finishing checking notebooks, or taking tests, everybody just goes. That's it. So many of us didn't know anything about [each other] and at Charles, you have a chance to have some dialogue, some conversation. You get to talking and things.

Because these students were both workers in business and industry as well as students, they often created business networking relationships. These networking activities often focused on offering professional assistance to other students in relation to their current corporate or professional roles.

At Charles there were three distinctly different perspectives on making personal connections with other students. Some students saw that adult student friendships happened because of the nature of the program. They believed that these friendships were part of being in a special environment with others who were like themselves. A few people saw the college classroom as their only social outlet and attempted to pursue social activities along with the academic pursuits. "But this is the biggest part of my social life because you spend so much time here." In addition, some Charles students believed that the liberal arts college environment would promote friendships; however, these students often reported that such friendships failed to develop. These folks were disappointed, suggesting a personal loss for them in the program. Another group of Charles students did not look to the College for their friendships and did not have the extra time to "hang out" after classes with their classmates. They wanted to come to class and leave. They felt they just didn't have time in their already overcrowded schedules for other new friends and activities.

This value and concern for friendship and personal connectedness was viewed differently by Allerton students. Because of the cohort experience and weekly study group requirement, there was a strong sense of personal connection with at least four to six other students in the study group. Beyond the personal linkage in support of each other, adult students at Allerton also saw other positive effects from the cohort and study group experiences.

> I think the big thing [more positive thing]—being in a management role like I'm in, I'll look for this kind of stuff. They really encourage team-building. They force you to be in the team. They call it study groups, but to me it's a team. They give the study groups assignments that takes all the members in that group to complete; they are usually really good assignments. You learn something from them and that's something that's really different.

Some Allerton students also felt the study group was key to their own survival in the academic program. "The study group, that makes the program work. Without the study group in the program, no individual could accomplish what they ask of you. With the study group, everyone learns to work together, depend upon each other. And that's the biggest plus the program has got going, I think is the study group." Those adults who valued the study group experience found it aided their educational output, as well as offered much needed support. For some, the cohort group was their major support which kept them motivated and prevented them from dropping out of the program. For a few students at Allerton, the study group was stifling and a source of conflict. These students felt they learned, in spite of their study group. They viewed their group as hampered by poor interpersonal relationships and not focusing on learning needs of all the group members.

The adult degree program provided student involvement through *instructors who cared about adult learners, as well as cared about course content.* These adult students expected expertise and quality instructional skills of a competent teacher. But these qualities of a valued instructor were only part of the expectation. These students also expected and found that most of their instructors demonstrated personal concern and interest in adult student lives. Most students valued faculty members who clearly understood the high stress and competing demands on adult time commitments. They expected faculty members to trust the adult student's judgement about potential conflicts with class meeting time, paper deadlines, or other related student-instructor expectations. These students reported many valued moments of teacher support.

> It's like being in class with friends, rather than just being a number in a class of fifty when some don't care. I've heard horror stories, but I have to say that because I have not been in a large university. So I can't say from experience. But I have heard stories about—you know—the instructors don't care. They're up there talking and teaching and they don't care if you're asleep, or they don't care what you're doing. [Allerton]

These adult students critically judged instructors who lacked relevant up-to-date knowledge, good instructional skills, or a favorable attitude towards adult learners.

Adult students in both adult degree programs valued *instructors with practitioner experiences which related to the adult learner world.* However, adult students at the two institutional sites spoke to this value of faculty practitioner experiences from a different perspective. At Charles, there was a subset of full-time faculty who came out of work experiences, or part-time faculty whose predominant role was working in the business environment. "And I think here you get a lot of professors, especially in business, who have businesses on the side or they're lawyers, or you know, they've been out in the work force, so they're still in the work force. And they're teaching and they bring like a wealth of experience. It's really great; I've enjoyed it here" [Charles]. This value for practitioner work experience in faculty was a subtheme for a subgrouping of Charles students. However, at Allerton the practitioner focus was a dominant theme among most of the students. As part of the design of the program, Allerton hired all part-time practitioners as instructors for their program. Therefore, students expected their instructors to have work expertise and insights and to focus the class on application of content in the day-to-day realities of the job. The occasional instructor without that relevant work experience was judged incompetent and ineffective by Allerton students.

Summary of Key Themes Regarding Involvement Focused on Quality of Classroom Academic Learning

Adult students in different institutional settings viewed quality classroom experiences from difference belief systems. Adult undergraduate students in the community college viewed quality classroom experiences as **Learning focused on becoming competent in academic knowledge.** Three key subthemes were noted within this discussion: 1) these adults believed that there was a special kind of knowledge and understanding at a college; 2) there was a specific impact upon them through the diversity of students in the community college; and 3) they valued recognition of their adult diverse life experiences in the classroom. Adult students in the public university viewed **Learning focused on sharing of mutual expertise and development of meanings.** Two key subthemes supporting this theme included: 1) they viewed the key to involvement in academic learning to come through faculty members in relation to their knowledge base; and 2) they valued their personal development of broader meanings in the classroom and their journey through the curriculum beyond the designed learning experiences. Adult undergraduate students in adult degree programs in liberal arts colleges viewed **Learning focused upon adult learners and their world.** Five key subthemes illuminating this theme included: 1) relevant and personalized learning experiences; 2) smaller classes and the participatory nature of the class sessions; 3) opportunities for making personal connections with other students who are also in professional roles; 4) instructors who cared about adult learners, as well as caring about course content; and 5) the valuing of instructors with practitioner experiences that related to the adult learner world.

Involvement Based in the Adult Learner Support Environment

Interwoven through previous discussions was the concern and importance of the adult life support environment for adult student involvement. This theme represents a direct view of the adult life in relation to the undergraduate academic world. Across all of the six interview settings, adults negotiated with the academic structures and learning processes in relation to their involvements as workers, family members, and community citizens. In each type of setting, adults noted their involvement was influenced by the particular environment which supported or did not support adult learners, as well as their personal life circumstances.

Particular Attention and Support in a Community College Environment

Adults in a community college setting desired and valued the perceived personal attention of the community college which supported them in their adult lives. These adults particularly valued the supportive attitude of personnel who understood the competing time and psychological demands of adult lives. Most believed that the community college attempted to provide courses formatted and scheduled to meet adult lives. However, some reported difficulties in getting the specific courses at the times and days of the week that fit their schedules, as well as accessing certain adult-oriented services. Most believed that the general atmosphere of the community college supported the adult life context.

Students believed that the community college gave *personal attention specifically focused on the adult life context.* They valued both being treated as individuals, but also the recognition in the classroom of their adult life responsibilities. As stated by one student, "My teachers...they are very cooperative with adults continuing their education....Here they kind of work with you and they understand—'Well, oh, you just got off work and you came straight to class.' And it's just like they want you to succeed" [Elmwood]. A number of individuals felt this personal attention and psychological support dramatically altered their lives.

> They've [Bayville] helped me to realize the potential that I didn't realize I had. And you know, a lot of the people that I've been associated with here, have been like me, in that they have done real well. And I'm sure there are a lot of people like myself, who never did very well until they came here in any other aspect of their life. And so I really have been real fortunate to be here. [Bayville]

Adults in the community college also noted their admiration for the *caring attitudes of college personnel towards adult students.* These adult students valued this environment of helpfulness and personal concern by community college faculty and staff. "This is a good school...the way you are treated as an individual, rather than a number. I think the faculty is very good at helping students like me" [Elmwood]. These adults perceived faculty as being significantly supportive and sensitive to adult students. In addition, faculty and staff were often reported to provide special, often unsolicited intervention to problem-solving student difficulties. As an example, three of the interviewed students at Elmwood noted special intervention by staff and faculty. In each situation, the faculty/staff member volunteered without student request and provided special help with college policies and personnel, often intervening in a policy that was creating difficulties for the student.

On the other hand, these adult students often felt that their needs as "adult" students were not clearly articulated in the institutional setting, and that there was a lack of focused services/activities to meet those needs. A subset of the adults believed that the community college environment could do more to provide a special sense of support and connectedness for the adult students, rather than serving students as generic individuals. They felt that the institution had not made special efforts to provide assistance or services solely to adult students. Their voiced concerns represented requests for 1) special adult student orientation; 2) a lounge for older students; 3) older student support group/social events for adult students; 4) day care for adult students; and 5) community publicity to encourage adults to enroll. A few students were also concerned about policies and structures which they felt were demeaning to them as adults. Some also believed that the community college culture focused on the young adult, catering to immature students just out of high school. As stated by a Bayville student, "This is too much like a stupid high school, in the way that they do—taking attendance, that's high schoolish. The way a lot of the teachers approach students is high schoolish. Everybody's suppose to be young adults. I don't need that garbage. I pay for my education."

Because these students represented a variety of work and family patterns, they had differing needs and requirements for preferred time-of-day course offerings. These adults felt that the community college should provide *course access at times which met their own adult life schedules.* Many adults, whether part-time or full-time students, believed that the course scheduling could be more diversified to meet the needs of afternoon, evening, and weekend students. These concerns did not just focus upon number of courses. Rather, students noted particular needs, dependent upon their curriculum, to access specific courses required in their program of study. Individuals who worked full time and had to fit in their course work between work, commuting, and family responsibilities raised the most significant concerns regarding course scheduling. A number of students reported difficulties in negotiating with employers or family care issues related to lack of specific courses offered at times convenient to them. In both of the community colleges, these adult students acknowledged the current cutback of state funds which impacted the course schedule. However, they also believed that the evening schedule seemed to have been more heavily affected in the cutbacks rather than the daytime schedule. These same concerns about course schedules were also reflected in Bayville student requests for lengthening of hours (including Saturdays) for access to the library and laboratories, as well as more evening and weekend hours to access advisors and counselors.

Adapting to Fit into the University in Relation to Adult Support Environments

Because adult undergraduates at the public university often perceived the university as more elite and judgmental, they often felt that adult students did not necessarily fit into the structures and processes. They believed that public universities were shaped for a particular kind of student, a full-time young adult directly out of high school who had done academically superior work.

Adult students often saw their *relationship to the university as one of adaptation and patient acceptance of the more dominant traditional culture.* Universities were often viewed as insensitive and unaware of adult life concerns. Adults often believed that the policies and the "bureaucracy" of the university inadvertently discriminated against adult students. Certain aspects of the university did make the environment more supportive and hospitable to adult learners. Most adult students noted many faculty and staff members who individually made a difference in their lives. These students also noted the value of the evening school (at one site), office of nontraditional and reentry students (at both sites), and special curriculum dedicated to night offerings for adult students([at both sites). In addition, there were also special policies, procedures, or mechanisms to support the adult student in admissions, gaining experiential credits, or other specialized concerns.

Adult students believed that there should be *academic policies which supported adult backgrounds and life circumstances.* Often they reported these concerns out of current frustrations and perceived injustices with their academic involvement. These points of discussion were more often presented by the part-time adult student. Paradoxically, full-time adult students often presented their current lives, as if they had adapted to the norms and expectations for the younger student culture and expectations of that group in this university environment. Because they were able to focus their major energies on campus and have the time to methodologically deal with daytime offices and personnel of the university, the logistics of involvement seemed to have been redefined for these adult students.

One of the key issues was *the desire that the university more readily accept past academic history in support of their current academic journey.* Students who brought prior course credit hours from other institutions often found significant frustration and futility in meshing the past and the present courses into a specific set of curriculum requirements. These individuals believed that all college course work should be equal and acceptable. Yet they found that most colleges and all universities were highly selective and sometimes negative towards transfer of course work. For these students, the university created a complex and evasive set of "double talk" standards for transfer of course work. Some students found that the university did not take course work from unaccredited institutions; unfortunately a few adults without knowledge of the significance of accredited institutions reported losing 30 to 60 hours of prior course work.

Most adults faced a myriad of policies regarding the nature of their past course work, the specifics of past institutional affiliation, and the amount of elapsed time since they had been enrolled in their previous course work. A number of adults who had taken technical associate degrees or had previously majored in a different academic area found that their courses were often accepted but did not count towards their program of study. In essence, the institution recognized the courses, but the courses did not shorten their journey in meeting curriculum requirements. This issue was significantly important because adult students saw their past academic accomplishments and financial resources thrown away by this obtuse academic ritual. For students who had enrolled in several institutions across the country, these review and decision-making mechanisms were extremely complicated. A segment of these students reported examining several alternative curricula to determine how much of their past course work would be accepted in relation to specific institutional requirements. Often their choice of a curriculum was based upon expediency rather than academic aspirations. As noted by one Fremont student, "I transferred here and I was in environmental engineering when I transferred...[the University accepted] 40 of my 49 hours, but they only applied 18 of them to the program. And then there was a whole lot of other prerequisites." This student decided not to continue to pursue engineering and refocused upon a program in environmental science and natural resources in the College of Agriculture. When asked about his decision, he noted that the program accepted more of his courses and that most of his previous courses would apply to that curriculum. From a different perspective, a Delta student commented,

> I've got transcripts from so many different places, I think I ended up transferring transcripts from five different institutions...I guess my worry was—some were community college, some were four-year college credits. I wanted to get at one place and stay there, and actually finish there and not move and have to go somewhere else. I wanted to make sure that what I took was going to count.

Because of the complexity of adult lives, many of these students were particularly concerned that the university provide *a more supportive academic environment to access courses and keep on schedule.* In both universities, these adults faced special problems in scheduling their courses in relation to their particular adult life demands. One Delta student who worked full time as a carpenter reported in frustration, "I have to go to school five days a week next semester to graduate in May, because...they're [the courses are] either given on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, or [on] Tuesday and Thursday. There's no night classes. There's no class on Saturday." A single-parent Fremont student described the broader concerns in this manner,

> Sometimes the class that I want to take is not offered [at] the time, [or] is not offered this semester...and some of the classes you have to take in sequence... so that has been a little trouble. Plus taking them on a night where there is nothing going on with my family that will interfere. And I always try to take classes on nights that I know there's not something going on...because of my personal family obligations.

Because these adults were in specialized curricula, they noted the serious problems of accessing required courses as part-time and night-time students. Most part-time and night-time students felt frustrated because their programs were already elongated. They did not want to face the additional burden of required courses scheduled at times and days of the week which did not meet their life schedules. As an example, one student noted his exasperation participating in an academic major as a day-time/part-time student while also working full time,

> But in [my major], they don't offer classes at night, I have to take them during the day. And that is very difficult, because coming from Y city, I mean that's an hour drive either way, and, then to mess with the hassle of parking, and to know what's going on in the school, and trying to take your class, and then, trying to get back to work to finish your eight-hour-day. It's just—it's hard. [Fremont]

This subtheme was very similar to the community college adult students; however, because of the more specialized nature of university academic disciplines, these concerns created more significant barriers. There were many academic programs which night-time-only adult students could not access.

Because these adults had often experienced other educational environments, they were aware of innovative and alternate processes to structure learning. These adults believed that the university could develop *a more specialized curriculum, alternative learning formats and assessment options* which met with their adult life circumstances. Several suggested accelerated degree programs. "E. Private College has a class for adults at night that they can go two nights a week...and they can get a four-year degree in two...If it can be done there, why can't it be done somewhere else" [Delta U]. Other students desired courses which were more flexible, that could be offered in an independent mode or in a distance learning mode, such as correspondence courses, independent projects, or telecourses. Several students at Delta noted their involvement and interest in Challenge Exams or CLEP examinations.

> I have done some CLEP examinations, college level equivalency program. Yes, I took educational psychology, humanities, social sciences, which was really more history...and I will be taking the test in Spanish....In the catalogue it tells you who to see, what building to go to and also gives you a list of what they will give, what the school will give you credit for. So I said what the heck, you know; 45 dollars beats paying for three hours of course work. And it also takes care of it real quick. So I did that.

As noted in the introduction to this major theme, adult students in both universities were *highly supportive of services oriented to the adult student.* Both universities provided Offices of Nontraditional and Reentry students and Fremont University also offered the Evening School for special access and support for the adult life context. These services were valuable because a number of students were concerned about support for the initial transition into the university. One of the specific fears and anxieties of entering adult undergraduates at public universities focused on being an "older adult" pursuing an undergraduate degree. Particularly for the adult students at Delta University, there was a clear belief that entering as an older student reflected being out-of-step and out-of-place in a collegiate learning environment. These students often believed they were oddities; they, in part, felt stupid because they could not immediately be part of the typical student culture. As one example, a student at Delta noted,

> Finding the class was another thing. I had my map, looking where is what and found like I was a complete idiot in the middle of the campus...everybody else seemed to know their way. I was just a dummy, not just sticking out. [I felt this way] because I was a much rare object/subject than I was at Elmwood Community College, [and] because I found less students my age here, definitely much less. Therefore, I found I was real insecure. But it did not last very long.

Not all adult students were initially anxious or intimidated with the university environment. There was a distinct grouping of adult students who were very self-confident, self-sufficient, and creative in making the academic culture and system work to meet their needs. Often these individuals believed that because of their prior success in their adult lives, they would also be successful in college life. Others had recent successful experiences at other institutions and presumed the same at the current university. Some adults believed that university personnel provided them the initial confidence and support, noting certain services or processes that were facilitative. A student at Delta University reported:

> I think I'm lucky because they had already set up an office—that's nontraditional student services. That was really nice. I didn't realize it, 'cause you're a little scared because it's all young people....A week or two before we started, they had a nontraditional student orientation. And they had the packets and information, and they had everyone from the library and like each important area or office to talk to you a little while. They offered different information than just a normal freshman orientation. They told you what to expect when you started—with families. I met somebody just for those few times, just a familiar face, just somebody that you've talked to before [you started classes]. And they were driving from Q City - which is about an hour away too. And so I thought, "Oh, good I'm not the only [one]." Knowing that somebody else is doing it. And when times get hard it's nice to know that other people have it that hard too. It gives you encouragement to keep going.

Beyond these services and supports, adult students also reported their desires for more targeted adult-oriented activities and services. One Fremont student noted, "I think they should have adult student orientation; I think they should have a center for adult programs—I think they ought to really make adults a little bit more aware of what's on campus." Students also requested academic information be directly mailed to adult students rather than having it lying around the campus for students to find. Particularly part-time students felt that they were not in the "communication loop" and were unconnected to their academic program. "I think there's just a difference because you're not on campus all the time. You're not seeing them [the professors] and you're not involved full time. And so there's always that feeling that you don't know what's going on, as far as within your department, and you don't really know who anybody is."

A number of adult students voiced concern for creating an institutional mechanism which brought adults together, such as an adult student support group, student activities which involved spouses and families, a social gathering for just adult students, involvement in student government, or intramural sports which included adults. This subset of adults felt the need to have that special social event or activity to create a connection with other adult students. In contrast, there were other students who felt they could not participate in campus activities because of their other full-time involvements in work and family.

> There are so many things this campus offers—that I can't take part in—either because the meetings are in the daytime or the meetings are scheduled on the nights that I have a class or it's just not feasible because I can't be away from the office...There are so many things that are scheduled, I can't take part in. And I really resent it. It makes me very angry; because I feel like I'm really missing a huge part that I'm excluded from—and I won't ever be able to do it because I have to work full-time.

Beyond possible services and social network supports, these working adults also believed that a university was like any organization; that it *should be more "customer sensitive," or "student sensitive."* They had expectations that universities should be organized efficiently, particularly in relation to registration for courses, advising, parking, and financial aids. At Delta University, students most often discussed issues of inefficiency of procedures and paper work such as change of majors or registration. "Maybe because it's...such a large school, there's so many people...It seems like they're pretty disorganized." Several Delta students also believed that the university procedures were designed for students who were 18 years old with parental supervision, and who were on campus all day long with no other responsibilities in their lives. As noted by one exasperated student, "And have them quit sending those stupid letters out for 29 cents an envelope, saying if your son's got an F or a D or something like that....I never, I just couldn't believe it; because they're cutting everything back supposedly 'cause of budgets." [Why send out a mid-term grade report letter to a 45-year-old student addressed to his parent?] Many part-time students noted difficulties in conducting student academic business. They also noted frustrations about the day-time only offices which provided services and procedures for the university, as well as negotiated through several different sets of offices and personnel who often had differing procedures on similar academic matters.

At Fremont University, student concerns for efficiency and customer sensitivity focused on parking.

> I wish they would solve the parking problem here. That's one of the hardest things too, attending a class scheduled during the day....That's really frustrating. And so, you're having to take maybe 15 or 20 minutes more than you normally would, because you know that you won't find a parking space...I actually missed a class once because I drove around for about 20 minutes looking for a parking space and I never found one.

Adult students at Fremont also believed that the university should assume that adult students had limited time to deal with academic bureaucracy. These students desired special adult student systems, if not institution-wide student systems, to make access as easy as possible.

> That was the biggest disappointment—I mean they do now [have telephone registration], but when I came from A & M—that environment—I lived 45 minutes away; but I took care of everything over the phone. Even as far as having to force myself into a class. I didn't have to go to campus—and here—I had to take a half a day from work to come and register for class.

Adult Programs Designed for Adult Support Environment

Adult degree programs in private liberal arts colleges were selected, appreciated, and praised for their commitment to the adult student learner. Adult students viewed this environment as sensitive to the complexity of adult life and designed to meet the adult life commitments and schedules. Faculty, staff, and general college procedures were believed to acknowledge and value adults in their diverse role demands. This adult life context involvement also focused upon personal connections between the college, the faculty, and the adult students.

Adult students valued the adult degree program because it was *grounded in adult access and adult life circumstances.* As noted by one student, "You know, that's a whole other animal—adult students—because you can't take what works in a traditional college of arts and sciences and apply it to the Adult Alternative college. Because you've got a whole different constituency that works on a whole different time frame" [Charles]. This understanding of the adult student and the "time frame for adult learning" was very important. These adults valued courses which were offered in the evening and on weekends. Offering courses in a one-evening format was extremely important to many individuals attending Charles, when compared to the class format alternative of a required two-night-a-week attendance at nearby Delta University. This one-night-per-week class format was also viewed as a matter of efficiency and an important saver of related time requirements for commuting, parking, and family logistics.

For the Allerton site, these adult students valued the format and scheduling of classes in an accelerated evening format. They also valued the predictable, sequential format of their entire curriculum, in comparison to other higher education institutions in the area. This attraction to the accelerated program format and its design for working adults was also a point of significant stress. The compressed program and learning experiences placed serious demands upon their time and energies.

A major contribution of the adult degree program was the *ease of initial entry and the personal, supportive attention.* At Allerton College, several students defined this experience as a "customer-oriented environment."

> There's very few hassles here. That means, I write a check, and they set down all the books I need for the whole semester, right in front of me. That means, I write a second check, and I have registered and paid for an entire semester, that's it. I park right out front, no parking sticker. I know exactly what my class schedule will be from now until the day I graduate. There's absolutely no question about it. I like to think about it as the closest thing you could come to education without having to think. You do have to think very hard for class, but you don't have to think of anything else. People that work don't have time for this other crap that you have to go through at a traditional school.

Often these students referred to previous experiences with other higher educational institutions, noting the impersonal and bureaucratic nature of their previous involvement.

> At Fremont U, probably my biggest gripe with Fremont is that it is so huge and you are just a tiny little speck in this huge organization. You have to go through all this red tape... And it works fine if you are a full-time student, you're living on campus, you don't have any trouble then. But if you're an adult and you have to work and you are coming from some other location—that's difficult for you.

On the whole, entry for these students in an adult degree program was very easy, comfortable, and supportive. In particular, these students reported initial valued assistance through the program director and adviser. A few students recommended additional entry supports. For some students at Charles, there was a desire for a student orientation program, assistance with study skills/time management, and for diverse faculty involvement in the advising process. Both groups of adults noted concerns about their need to initially get up to a level of competency and efficiency in studying, reading, and remembering the course content.

Scheduling of courses and curriculum was an important advantage of the adult degree program. These adult students felt they had an institutional *"assurance" that courses would be offered and would be available on an adult schedule.* Students at Allerton valued a predefined schedule for their entire program. At Charles, adult students also had the opportunity to have their major academic program sequence laid out and also had assurances that courses for their curriculum would be available and accessible at night or on the weekends.

While these assurances of course access on an adult time frame were valued, a number of the students reported an alternate concern for more flexibility in course selection and in curriculum alternatives. Adults liked the certainty of the regulated and sequential required curriculum at Allerton. And they valued the college commitment of access to the predominant course-required curricula in each of the business areas of Charles. However, several objected to the lack of flexibility in course selection. Many wished for greater choice in elective courses of personal interest. At Charles, these students saw their involvement in a liberal arts college as offering them opportunities to build a broad base of knowledge; however, they were concerned about the lack of electives to pursue those interests through limited night or weekend courses. Allerton students focused their concerns on the limited curriculum choice of applied organizational management. As one student noted,

> I certainly would not have picked this curriculum if I had a better [choice]... this was probably my last choice. I went everywhere else and I couldn't get the curriculum...If I could get an engineering degree from an accredited school, an evening school, I'd be there in a heart beat. I wouldn't care if it took me fifteen years, I'd be there. I think it's real discouraging to me, it's discouraging that there is not a better, bigger variety of choice regarding night school curriculum.

Acceptance of transferred course hours was an issue that brought many students to Allerton College and some students to Charles College. They viewed the college acceptance of their past academic work as support of adult life circumstances. Most of these students had experienced prior enrollments with other collegiate institutions and found difficulties with transfer of course credit hours. Because Allerton's adult degree program was an upper-division program, there were more lenient perspectives on the validity of past course work as it applied to a four-year degree. As noted by one student, "With all my [prior] classes in technical oriented things, hardly any of those applied again towards any of those degrees I could get at evening school at Fremont University. So, I would be starting over again and I didn't want to do that. With this program they gave me credit for those hours, and a shorter time to get out." There were fewer discussions of course transfer of hours by adult students at Charles. However, one student chose Charles over Delta University because of the difficulties of transferring course hours from a community college. In addition, the student reported a perceived discrimination by the local public university (Delta) against community college graduates who were not from the local region.

Many students at Allerton were attracted to the adult degree program because they could gain course credit hours through *assessment of life experiences for academic equivalency credit*. This component of the academic program offered a mechanism to speed up the degree process while also acknowledging the importance of past adult life history involvement in training and learning. These adults valued Allerton's belief that training/education experiences in work and community life could be assessed for equivalency to academic course work. These adults also realized that portfolio assessment was controversial in their community of work and family colleagues. In discussing involvement with the portfolio assessment, one student reported, "But it's not a 'gimme.' My experience with portfolio is—if you don't know the information you cannot write the paper on it. And if you don't have the proof, verification, and then you're not going to get credit. It's not a gimme." Adults in this customized program faced a unique dilemma of both being attracted to the adult-designed curriculum and program for its support and ease, while also knowing that others in the community judged this program to have a lesser reputation than a more traditional environment. Thus, these adults often reported that others judged their adult-oriented academic program as being an "easy, non-demanding program." This negative judgement came from those who defined quality as a traditional instructional environment. However, for the students at Allerton, this portfolio assessment alternative was a valued support for adult life context. Charles College did not offer any nontraditional components, such as portfolio assessment in their program, and therefore there were not similar perspectives raised by this group.

Summary of Key Themes Regarding Involvement Based in the Adult Learner Support Environment

There were several common broad perceptions of involvement and support of the adult life context across all institutions. However, as has been noted in this section, adult students viewed these perceptions for adult support from different vantage points. Adults in the community college setting noted the specific theme of **Particular attention and support in a community college environment** as pivotal in their involvement. They also noted three subthemes of: 1) personal attention specifically focused on the adult life context; 2) caring attitudes of college personnel towards adult students; and 3) course access at times which met their own adult life schedules. Adults in the public university setting noted a different theme related to the adult learner support environment: **Adapting to fit into the university in relation to adult life contexts.** Within this theme, seven subthemes were described: 1) relationship to the university as one of adaptation and patient acceptance to the more dominant traditional culture; 2) valuing of academic policies which supported adult backgrounds and life circumstances; 3) desiring the university to more readily accept past academic history in support of their current academic journey; 4) desiring a more supportive academic environment to access courses and keep on schedule; 5) desiring a more specialized curriculum focused to adults, alternative learning formats and assessment options; 6) valuing supportive services oriented to the adult student; and 7) desiring the university to be more "customer sensitive," or "student sensitive." Adults in the adult degree program in a private liberal arts college illuminated a theme focused on **Adult programs designed for adult life contexts.** Five key subthemes were voiced: 1) adult programs were grounded in adult access and adult life circumstances; 2) there was an ease of initial entry and personalized attention; 3) there were "assurances" that courses would be offered and would be available on an adult schedule; 4) there was a more supportive acceptance of transferred course hours; and 5) there was valuing of assessment of life experiences for academic equivalency credit.

Involvement Based on Financial Access Concerns

Financial support for access was often voiced within the previous theme of involvement based on adult support environment. However, for these adults financial support for access was not just a personal matter. This key theme of financial access was interwoven between personal, institutional and societal access support for adults. For these adult students, financial access was the most vibrant and consistent theme. At all three types of institutions adults noted financial support as a significant factor of involvement. However, in each of these settings, adult students viewed and experienced the issues of financial support from differing perspectives.

The adult students at the community college were extremely concerned about financial support. They had selected the community college because of low tuition costs. In addition, most of these students had attempted to seek out financial assistance, often with limited success. Because few of these adult students were receiving any financial aid either from the institution, governmental agencies or their employer, *funding for college came from their personal finances.* Not surprisingly, the part-time students voiced much greater concerns about costs than did the full-time students. It would appear that the adult full-time students had usually created greater economic margin by retirement income, spousal support, part-time work, or savings/loans. On the other hand, part-time students had to maintain their own economic support for their adult responsibilities while also generating additional monies for college involvement. A few full-time adult students reported involvement in either college work-study or college tutoring activities with salaries from the college.

Because these adults often had spouses, children (including those who were also attending college) and other related financial responsibilities, going to college was a long-term financial commitment. A number of students noted that they were looking at the "long haul picture." These adults more often had attempted to plan ahead and identify selected resources to support them at each stage of their college education. For those students who focused upon a four-year degree, they often used initial support from work or family. They hoped that their upper-division work would be supported by financial assistance from the institution or governmental agencies. These individuals often reported that the last year or two of college studies they planned to get a loan and incur other personal debts to make it. Some students spoke hesitantly about moving on to an upper-division institution. A significant part of this hesitation was the lack of financial support for continuing their studies. Students with limited financial resources spoke of searching for external financial support. Several noted significant difficulties in seeking out financial support, given the myriad of bureaucracies and forms. For some students, it was just a difficult and defeating experience, because they believed that the financial aid system was set up to actively discriminate against adult students.

> The thing that concerns me most about the educational system is that it is not set up for the older student. And it begins with the ability to acquire a scholarship for example. They are given in mass to the younger children, to the children. There is no ability [scholarships are not given on demonstrated ability]. There's about zero help for me to go get a scholarship, even though the same grade point average would give me one if I was 22 years old. [Bayville]

Another student reported:

> I would like to see more scholarships available because I looked...I've researched scholarships...in that library trying to find a scholarship that would pertain to me, that would help me. And everything was basically those SAT scores or this [emphasis on] fresh out of high school...or in their junior year and you're studying this and that. If I saw anything, it was obsolete...I must have mailed out at least 40 or 50 correspondence trying to get someone to respond on a scholarship offer. Couldn't find anything that would pertain to the older student, you know, 30 plus. I guess society treats us like we should of did [sic] it when we was [sic] kids like everybody else did—"How dare you go back now and think somebody is suppose to run in behind you [and support you]." [Elmwood]

Public university students were also concerned about financial support and access. These students reported significant pressures to keep their financial lives in reasonable condition, while also expending additional funds for tuition, books, travel and related expenses. The full-time students had often figured out a way to "balance the money situation" by having spousal support or other mechanisms to finance education. For part-time students, it was a serious concern unless they were able to access employer tuition reimbursement programs. Financial support for these adults was often viewed as a "hurdle" to surmount. For these folks, the higher tuition (in relation to a community college) and the other major demands on their lives of work, family, and studies created great stress. These adults noted ways they attempted to solve the issue through support of spouse, debts, and going intermittently to school in relation to resources saved from work. Again, the group of adults who needed additional financial assistance found that the university financial aid offices were unable and unwilling to find sources of support for their continuation in studies.

> I find that our financial aid situation is terrible. But I find the adult students kind of in a limbo when it comes to financial aid, 'cause we're put through the same criteria that they have for kids. The other day in school I was told by a financial aid officer, "Well, you're supposed to have saved half of the money you made to put aside for education." I said, "Wait a minute, how could you possibly save half of what you made when it took all of what you made to pay [for his family]?"—[The financial aids officer remarked], "Well, you know,—we base this on the fact that if you're making money—your parents are paying your expenses and everything and you don't have any living expenses to pay—so you got to put half of your money away for education."... So a lot of the criteria for financial aid is built around a kind of fresh out of school...[of] staying with your parents. And it's kind of a bad situation because I find a lot of adult students would like to go, but the hard cruel reality is you have to make a living. And you can't make a living while you're in school unless it's—you really juggle things around and go part time and work part time.

Adult undergraduate students in adult degree programs in the private liberal arts college faced a slightly different issue. Because of the high costs of tuition, these enrolled adults had determined prior to entry their ability to find support. Most often that support came from employer tuition reimbursement programs. However, these individuals reported a paradox of choice and support wedded to high tuition costs. They were very aware of the high costs, yet were fortunate to participate in employer reimbursement programs. Approximately 85% and 80% of Allerton and Charles College adult students, respectively, reported employer tuition reimbursement support as the chief source of tuition. Without employer support, most of the students would not have attended the adult degree program in the private liberal arts college. Thus, some students felt both highly blessed and guilty to be one of the select few to access and complete an adultdegree undergraduate program. They realized that there were many other adults who were prohibited from participation because of the tuition costs. "Probably if it was within my power, I would probably make it more affordable to more people. Because it is very expensive and I've said before, without the employer's assistance program I know I couldn't afford to come here." Some believed that it was antithetical to have a customized program for adults and then charge a very high tuition which screened out many potential adult participants. There were also other concerns about financial costs beyond the tuition rate. Many of these students often had to find additional financial support for their course work and books not covered by employer reimbursement programs. Many students spoke to the stress of these financial issues as they attempted to balance their lives and draw upon other family income or loans while participating in the only accessible quality degree program for adults in the area. Some students reported that they expected a higher quality of education for the high costs of tuition. At times they judged the instructors and the courses to not measure up to a "first-rate" education. Because of the high cost of the program, they expected the very best of instructors and quality instructional experiences directed to that adult learner group. There were also a few students who, because of personal desire or because of original employer support with subsequent lay-off, were paying their own way through the private college. These individuals noted the particular value of the program, but also the high financial burden they had accepted.

At all three sites, adults saw the costs of college as a significant issue, because there was not the support from the institution, from private sources, or from governmental agencies. This lack of support often communicated to these adults the lack of societal valuing of collegiate education after the initial young adult years.

INVOLVEMENT REVISITED

Involvement in the Broader College Community

A number of authors have suggested that college involvement should reflect total immersion in the academic experience. Students should live on-campus and engage in a wide variety of cultural and social activities within the academic community. Adult students in this study clearly did not believe that quality collegiate learning experiences were embedded in on-campus non-curricular participation. These adults spoke to a different belief about collegiate participation and involvement. They viewed involvement from 1) the learning dimension—where their key connections and involvements focused on the classroom and the quality of the faculty, and 2) the personal social dimension—where their "needs" for interactions were met either through in-class or selective out-of-class relationships, with majority involvement in adult roles of work, family, and community relationships.

Only a select subgroup of the students valued participation in more traditional on-campus activities, such as clubs, student government, student gatherings, and campus cultural activities. These notions of involvement were often viewed as a special, but not a necessary, addition to student lives. Most adult students focused upon their primary commitments of work, family, and school, while defining those optional events such as campus activities under spare time and special interest categories. Just as adults faced a residential community of many events and interests with limited commitments to participate, so also these adults viewed the college campus as filled with predominantly young adult events, with limited offerings sufficiently valued for participation. They judged the clubs, social events, and recreational program as having limited drawing power for very busy and often over-committed adult lives.

If the quality of learning experiences for young adults came from immersion in collegiate on-campus life, adult learning experiences came from immersion in classroom, work, family, and community experiences. Many adults spoke to the inter-relationships between their current class learning experiences with their job activities. Those adults with children in school often spoke to being a family which studied together and focused upon the learning process for all members. These adults desired to inculcate the values of education and the enjoyment of studying with their family. Most adults had eliminated involvements in church and community because of the demands of work, family, and school. However, there were a few individuals who interrelated their student learning experiences with continued community and church involvements. In all of these cases, these adults brought current learning into their broader adult lives to gain further understanding, awareness, applications, and sometimes changes within themselves or their lives.

A few *adult students in the community college valued* extracurricular involvements. The most powerful statements came from students involved in *Phi Theta Kappa,* the national two-year college honor society. This particular membership in the honor service society was extremely important and meaningful. For these select students, participation in this honor society was viewed as one of the most important involvements in their student lives. It was valued for the opportunities to interact with fellow academic achievers, to work on community service projects, and to receive special recognition for their scholastic achievements. Some students saw their involvement as an advantage for later applications into four-year colleges and to future employers. Beyond that particular organization, most of those involved in outside activities were full-time students who participated in academically related activities, such as operation health check on campus, as a community college student ambassador providing campus tours to prospective students, or as a volunteer with dress rehearsals at the community college theater.

Adult students in public universities and the private liberal arts college noted limited participation in special campus clubs or activities. Students involved in college activities were often full-time students or students who had a particular belief in the significance of working with a club that reflected their future professional field or participated in a university cultural or sports program with their spouse and family. Most noted the difficulties of finding sufficient time to study and maintain their lives, thus questioning any opportunities to come on-campus for "leisure events." These adults preferred informal gatherings and involvements beyond the classroom. Particularly, adults with children noted the lack of campus awareness of marriage and family as a key detriment both in terms of programs oriented to single students, as well as the time commitments preferred by on-campus students.

In the adult degree program at Charles College, one group of adult students believed that *part of a liberal arts education was involvement in the greater community life of the college.* Several of the interviewees were involved in student government, the honor code council, or in social gatherings offered by the college. These students believed that a liberal arts college education reflected an individual involvement and commitment in the broader college community. They specifically assumed and expected that the college would provide and support those involvements in relation to their adult lifestyle. They wanted to be involved and make their own unique contributions to the college. As suggested by one of the adults at Charles,

> I'm the kind of person who wants to know about everything. I'm going to be involved... And that's the thing that's lacking with the adult programs—

> social contacts....Not only do you have academics in the [college] community, but also have your social part of the community as well, even if time is very strenuous. You've got to make time for that [well] rounded person, you've got to take time to do that.

Other students viewed their sense of involvement at Charles solely from a class and student contact perspective. They saw their lives as having limited time and competing priorities. "Even though they try to have some activities for just the Adult Alternative College, I've never been, because I don't have time to go and I just...we're [adult students] too different from the rest of the school right now." This discussion of involvement or noninvolvement in the college community was not present in discussions with Allerton students. Perhaps because of the nature of the accelerated degree program and intensive study format, the off-campus location, or the nature of these students, there was no awareness of collegiate involvement beyond the classroom and no expressed concern for involvement in the broader interests of a collegiate community.

Involvement as a Continuous Negotiation Process

Past literature would suggest that involvement in college studies is a full-time consuming experience for an undergraduate student. However, in the lives of adult undergraduates, there were the forces of work, family, and citizen roles that significantly altered the adult commitments to college involvement, as well as the forces of mission, policies, and structures of the institution which also altered the involvement.

Two contrapuntal themes of negotiation often had significant influence in the actions of adult students and their involvement in college work. The first intervening theme focused upon their negotiations in life commitments and values to meet their complex and demanding lives. None of the interviewed adults in this study experienced the idyllic life of the traditional full-time student. They did not expect sufficient economic support and a simpler life style that allowed for the total immersion in academics and related collegiate activities. Rather, these adult undergraduates saw their lives filled with many important responsibilities and competing demands. These adults spoke to a value priority system to allocate their time, resources, and energies. Most believed that their first responsibility was to their job, because it provided financial support for their families and themselves. Some viewed this priority from a survival perspective for economic well-being. Others made work their priority based upon ego, professional identity, and projected life success. Congruent with recent discussions by Shore, *The Overworked Americans* (1993), these adults worked very hard. Often, they spoke to the tenuous nature of their work lives. Whether these adults were working, were dislocated, or were seeking new careers and promotions, their perceived success in their work roles and in their economic provider role was dependent upon their success in college. This belief in college as an important base for future life success was reflected, for example, in "a survey at two large Boston corporations [which] found that over 20 percent of full-time employees were also enrolled in school" (Shore, p. 161).

After work commitments, adult undergraduates usually suggested that their second priority for time and involvement was with their family and related physical and emotional needs. (If an adult undergraduate, either male or female, had taken on the major child rearing role for the family, this commitment became the first priority.) These adults valued their marriages and their children. They wanted a better life and viewed college involvement as a key way to gain that new future. The third priority focused upon citizen/church/community involvements, leisure/selfinvolvements, or extracurricular collegiate activities. Where did college involvement fit into their lives? Each student continually engaged in reallocating time, resources, and attention to both attending college and the equally important involvement in the learning and studying processes. For some students, college involvement was their first priority. For some adults, college came after their jobs and before their family or children. However, for most adults, college involvement was a third priority with diminished or no citizen/church/community involvements or personal time for leisure or self-development.

Most adult undergraduates had a clear value commitment to college. However, as suggested in a second contrapuntal theme of involvement, these adult students often renegotiated each semester/quarter enrollment in college in relation to the other demands and responsibilities of their lives. When possible, the nature of the participation (amount and kinds of courses) was modified from semester to semester based upon their complex life circumstances. For some, this process was interwoven with the adult-oriented academic structures and access of the college. Their involvement rested on course offerings at times, places, and formats supporting their current life demands. Unfortunately, many adults did not experience an ease of access. They were caught in an ongoing renegotiation process of reworking their adult life commitments and priorities to conform to the conventional dictates of time, place, and access to an academic program. Sometimes they had to reduce course hours, with other times focused on adding additional hours in attendance. They spoke to a continuing tension between meeting adult life demands and meeting the personal and professional demands for a college degree. Each of these adults presented a personal story of these two contrapuntal themes to balance their life commitments and then also to balance their commitment to college within these other life involvements.

Institutional Context for Involvement

Involvement by adult students was clearly influenced by the context of each of the three types of academic institutions in the study: public community college, public universities, and adult degree programs in private liberal arts colleges. These adults voiced personal images and experiences of their own learning journey in relation to the entry and continuing academic structures, processes, and peoples of these institutions. Although there were some commonly voice experiences, more often these adults reported unique experiences with the particular institutional context in relation to their particular academic journey. To provide the reader with further background regarding institutional context differences and adult student involvement, the three types of institutions will be briefly characterized.

Public community colleges are open-door institutions with a mission of community access for students across the adult lifespan. As state-funded institutions, community colleges are legislated to serve multiple missions, emphasizing the concept of open access. These institutions offer lower tuition rates, services to remediate academic deficiencies, degree and certification programs in either college transfer (two years of lower-division coursework) or technical/occupational career programs, and are purposefully placed in regional districts or geographic service areas for ease of access. Many community colleges actively reach the community through telecourses, credit and noncredit offerings at business and industrial sites, and other innovative efforts targeted to community needs. The community college's mission includes: helping the citizens of the community, supporting diverse adult learning needs, and providing a direct economic linkage between education and employable knowledge and skills.

Most community colleges/junior colleges are a valued higher education environment for adult learners. Currently the majority of community college credit enrollments represent adult students, with an average age of 28 years. This open-access mission has produced a supportive and hospitable environment for adult student entry or re-entry into higher education. For example, although only 18% (16 of 90) of the interviewed students were first-time college students, over half of these students entered the community college.

This study interviewed adult students at two community colleges. Bayville Community College represented a moderate-size community college of 7,800 in a rural/urban setting, with two satellite campuses in a service area of 350,000 population. Elmwood Community College represented one of the larger community colleges with 30,000 enrollment in a predominantly urban center city setting. It offered a number of satellite campuses, extensive telecourses and served a population of over one million.

Public universities represent comprehensive institutions with undergraduate and master's degree programs in the liberal arts and sciences, as well as in professional degree areas; in addition, comprehensive public universities also offer doctoral degree programs. The public university has the multiple missions of teaching, research, and service; however, there is often a significant cultural press emphasizing the research mission and its attendant impact upon national perceptions of the quality of the university. Public universities also face conflicting pressures for recruiting higher quality students and supporting selective admissions, while also providing access to a public university education for the state's citizens. In recent years, universities have also faced new expectations and challenges for development of state economic resources through specific instructional and service linkages with business and industry.

The public university's commitments to serve adult learners are usually reflected in institutional policy support for adult access to undergraduate education, as well as through support of continuing education. However, not all public universities provide an environment that welcomes adult students. Rather, each institution actively regulates inclusion of adult undergraduate students through access and support policies, as well as academic program structures. Some public universities have a long history of serving adult learners through their extension or continuing education programs. These public universities with active outreach and support of adult learners usually draw upon their Division of Continuing Education, meshing the continuing education outreach mission into the structures and functions of academic affairs and student affairs. There are also many public universities that have had very limited interest or do not value adult involvement as undergraduate learners. Those institutions with exclusionary environments often state a specific focus upon traditional (young adult) undergraduate education, selective graduate programs, and intensive research activities.

Two different public universities were part of the research study. Delta University had limited support policies for adult students. Fremont University had a long tradition of offering adult access to undergraduate course work through the Evening School as part of the Division of Continuing Education. Fremont also had a few institutional support policies for adult undergraduate students. Each of the institutions offered courses and academic programs for adult access at night. However, neither of the institutions would designate themselves as an adult-oriented university. Both universities had recently developed an office targeted to adult and re-entry/nontraditional students housed in the Division of Student Affairs. At these two universities, adult undergraduate student enrollment (adults above the age of 25 years in relation to the total undergraduate population) were 18% and 17% at Delta and Fremont universities, respectively.

The third type of institutional context in this study was the **adult degree program in a private liberal arts college.** Private liberal arts colleges have an historical mission focused upon the liberal education of young adults in a residential living-learning undergraduate environment. Often these institutions were created from a religious or philanthropic support base, with many institutions continuing that involvement with an academic mission grounded in those founding values. Unlike community colleges and universities, private liberal arts colleges typically have a more predominant concern with the quality instructional environment, with a more circumscribed focus on research and service. Due to a desire to reach adult learners and the lifelong learning movement, or due to the necessity to create a new mission and market for their own survival, many private liberal arts college have recently created special programs and sometimes an entire academic unit focused upon adult learners. These adult programs are in infinite variation and kind. The nature of the program and other support structures is often dependent upon the particular location, the flexibility for access, the desire to customize a curriculum, and the specific belief systems of the institution in relation to the undergraduate learning experience. Because of their private status, these colleges also have been more creative in their design and delivery of adult programs, unrestricted by state and community regulations and many political pressures.

This study included two adult degree programs at private liberal arts colleges. The location of Charles College within an urban central city and its historical reputation as a prestigious liberal arts college were key attractors for adult students. Charles College had created a specific academic unit, the Adult Alternative

College, to offer degree programs on evenings and weekends for working adults. This College featured a variety of upper-division professional degrees, grounded in a lower-division liberal arts curriculum. Courses were offered through small-class involvement (15 to 20 students) and were held in a traditional semester format. Instruction at Charles College was provided by their current faculty with some part-time adjunct faculty who held full-time professional roles in the community.

The second research site was an extension campus of Allerton College, whose main campus was located in a rural community. This extension site at West City was one of the larger enrollment sites for the adult degree program because of its placement in a larger, economically diverse community. Allerton College offered a unique adult degree program with one undergraduate major in applied organizational management. Adults were attracted to this program because of its accelerated pace, its use of portfolio assessment, and its focus upon applied management. Targeted to working adults, this adult degree program was unique when compared to the traditional undergraduate program on the main campus. The upper-division degree program emphasized the applied nature of knowledge in the work environment and participatory adult-oriented classroom learning experiences. Allerton's adult degree program was an accelerated program, featuring a cohort experience of 12 to 15 students who went through the entire 15-month curriculum together. The program had a sequential fixed curriculum with each course offered in a four- to six-week format; the majority of faculty were practitioner instructors. Classes met one night a week for four hours; a required study group of two to six people met for another four hours a week. Students could choose to participate in a portfolio assessment of academically equivalent life experiences, which could contribute up to 24 hours of course credit in the program. Prior collegiate course work, as well as CLEP and PONSI, would be used for credit.

Because most adult degree programs in a liberal arts college have limited curricular offerings, this study only included adults who were enrolled in business-related degree programs. At Allerton, interviewed students were enrolled in the applied organizational management program, while at Charles, interviewed adult students were enrolled in business, accounting, or computer information systems degree programs. Two additional features distinguished the adult students attending the adult degree programs. The majority reported using employer tuition reimbursement programs as their chief financial support. Approximately 85% and 80% of Allerton and Charles College adult students, respectively, reported employer tuition reimbursement support as the chief source of tuition. In addition, compared with the working adults at the community colleges and public universities, the majority of Allerton and Charles Charles adult students were employed in middle management or professional occupations.

SUMMARY

Adult images of involvement reflected a set of differing themes according to the institutional setting. As noted in the following table, Categories and Themes of Involvement by Adult Undergraduates, five major areas of involvement by adult students emerged:

1) involvement influenced by the adult value selection of institution and academic program;

2) involvement as an expression for a quality college education;

3) involvement focused on academic learning through the classroom;

4) involvement based in the adult learner support environment; and

5) involvement based on financial access.

TABLE 3
Categories and Themes of Involvement by Adult Undergraduates

Key Categories of Involvement	*Community College Themes of Involvement*	*Public University Themes of Involvement*	*Adult Degree Program in a Private Liberal Arts College Themes of Involvement*
Value Selection of Program and Institution	Academic opportunity to succeed	Importance and complexity of a university	Customized adult academic program
Desiring a Quality College Education	Current personal support and success & future success in 4-year college	Quality linked to prestige and academic demands	Reputation of college & support of adult academic requirements
Quality of Class Academic Learning	Learning focused on becoming competent in academic knowledge	Learning focused on expertise sharing and meaning development	Learning focused upon adult learners and their world
Adult Learner Support Environment	Particular attention and support for adults	Adapting to fit into the university in relation to adult learner contexts	Programs designed for adult life support environments
Key Financial Access Concern	Financial access and high personal costs	Financial access and high personal costs	Financial access for others and personal financial costs

As suggested by these discussions, adult involvement is focused not upon the ability to totally live and participate in one culture as suggested by earlier literature. Rather the nature of connections, the purposefulness of the relationships, and the quality of experiences suggest involvement viewed from a broader world perspective. Thus, academic outcomes are influenced by both the internal campus environment, but more broadly by the wealth of past and current adult commitments, involvements, and related experiences that influence learning and action in the world. The quality of the students' involvements appears to be directly related to the beliefs and experiences of a particular institutional context, along with the adult life of work, family, and citizen roles as it can be balanced and integrated with academic learning pursuits.

Chapter 5

The Adult Perspective of Undergraduate Life in the Context of Family, Work, and Community Life

INTRODUCTION

In their daily lives, most adults are family members, workers, and citizens. How does this adult life context mesh with undergraduate student life? Is studenthood a mere appendage tacked onto more vital chapters of adult life or does studenthood represent a new chapter? Is the adult college experience essentially bounded by the campus and classroom or are their different boundaries? How can we frame the adult's experience as an undergraduate in order to enhance our understanding?

Common social conceptions of the collegiate experience as well as past research has focused on the higher education experience as a campus-bounded, four-year, full-time, residential, young adult event. Adults pursuing undergraduate study, however, are not commonly involved in such a manner. The majority of adult collegians are part-time students who commute. Their life is based in a complex framework of adult life roles including family, work, and community roles. Because adult undergraduate students are workers, parents, spouses, and community leaders, their involvement in institutions of higher learning is very different from that of younger students. Past research on adult undergraduate students has suggested that these major life roles and other adult life experiences significantly influence their learning experiences and participation. This study begins with a concern for the context of adult life as the primary setting for involvement in contrast to a view of the collegiate setting as the context. While the student role is viewed as a voluntary addition to adult lives, this study assumes that adults interpret and make sense of student life as they experience it according to the context of their other life roles and experiences, both past and present. The study seeks to understand how adults integrate college involvement and learning into daily lives filled with myriad roles and responsibilities.

The study assumed that adults who add a collegiate role to existing adult life roles will find a persistent need to make changes and adjustments in the performance of other roles within the family, the work place, and the community. The complexity of this adjustment and the conflicting demands of multiple roles are assumed to influence the adult's participation and learning in important ways.

Collegiate learning based in an adult life context offers unique challenges to the adult. For example, traditional students are most often campus residents living within a culture where student behaviors are known, accepted, supported, and encouraged. When an adult assumes the college student role, student behaviors must be fit into their existing roles and responsibilities which are seldom specifically supportive of class attendance and study activities. Adults assuming the adult college student role first face a need to determine the essential college-related behaviors and they then must interpret the importance of these within their particular life context. In order to understand the adult college student role set within the adult life context, study participants were asked to describe their adult life roles and their conceptions of their college student role. Key themes were identified related to the interrelationships between adult work, family, and community roles and their experiences as college students.

ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTER

This chapter is divided into four sections, three dealing with major adult roles and the fourth with the adult college student role. The most salient themes related to the experiences of many participants have been included. Whenever particular subgroups have been more strongly identified with a particular theme or one aspect of that theme, this is noted in the discussion.

The first section deals with the family context. Adult student views of the changes and adjustments in the family roles of spouse, parent, and son or daughter are presented. Adult students interpret their student role within the family context in different ways. Most assumed the student role with some hesitation and struggled with their inability to fulfill the demands of studenthood along with their family-based roles. The critical role of family support and the nature of support from spouses, children, and the students' parents are presented.

Section two presents the themes related to the role of worker. These adults gave work a prominent place in their lives. The themes reflect this prominence and the importance of work place support is apparent. Participants perceived several different types of employer support and identified the most significant individuals within the work site who affected their own pursuit of undergraduate study.

The next section encompasses the adult collegian's views of involvement in degree pursuit. The themes relate to the difficulties of degree pursuit in a nontraditional manner, the standards adults set for themselves as students, the effects of participation on adults' self-concept, and the importance of other adult college students as models. Significant themes related to prior experiences in higher education are also discussed.

The final section deals with the adults' community-based roles. Included in this section is a discussion of the part friends play in the support of the adult undergraduate.

A chart of key themes, **Categories and Themes of Life Role by Adult Undergraduates**, is found at the end of this chapter. It provides a summary of themes linked with the four adult life roles of family member, worker, college student, and community member.

THE ADULT UNDERGRADUATE AS FAMILY MEMBER

Introduction

An individual's social roles are understood chiefly in the context of the family. Roles are developed and assigned according to a person's position in the family. How well a family member fills his/her role is also judged and critiqued within the family (Goode, 1960). Family tasks include resource allocation, division of labor, reproduction and nurture of offspring, movement of members into contributing roles in the larger society, and maintenance of motivation and morale (Duvall, 1985). Participants in this research study found all of these tasks altered by their collegiate involvement. Extensive study of typical family roles, however, has generally overlooked the role of adult college student. Very little is known about the interaction among family roles and the adult student role.

Two investigative motifs in the literature have made specific connections between family roles and the student role. The first has emphasized role conflict and related coping strategies (Gilbert, Manning & Ponder, 1980; Hooper, 1979; Huston-Hoburg & Strange, 1986). These studies have firmly linked relational conflict with the adult student role. Relational conflict was experienced by some participants in this study, but their overall perceptions clearly indicated significant relational support rather than conflict. The second has looked to the family context as the source of motivation for collegiate involvement. For example, changing family patterns, such as the launching of the youngest child or divorce, have been cited as precursors to collegiate involvement (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Slotnick, Pelton, Fuller & Tabor, 1993). Study participants noted that such changing family patterns often supplied some amount of unoccupied time in the adult's life, which was an essential resource needed in order to pursue college involvement. In addition, the time vacancy often created a sense of need that these particular adults chose to fill by involvement as a college student rather than in some other way. While collegiate involvement is generally associated with prior involvement in higher education, some study participants selected this option with limited prior involvement in higher education. In addition, many of these study participants *actively sought*, over a period of months and years, a time when family responsibilities were reduced in order to be free to pursue a baccalaureate degree. Their motivation for collegiate study *preceded* changes in family patterns.

Three other common assumptions in the literature have indicated relationships between college study and family roles and responsibilities. First, the full-time college student role is presumed to require a significant block of time in the adult's life. This block of time is most often associated with the substitution of college study for the work role (Spanard, 1990). However, study participants challenged the assumption that large blocks of free time are always needed for collegiate involvement. Some participants in this study added full-time college study to their lives while maintaining their full-time work role. Others substituted the student role while adding *additional* family roles.

Second, the adult's typical part-time college attendance pattern has been assumed to be a consequence of the demands of competing adult life roles. Adult college students in this research study revealed that the nature of the competition is complex and varied according to individual life circumstances. Family life in the childbearing family with both parents employed obviously contains significant competing demands. Following the competing demands assumption, this family pattern might then reasonably correspond with part-time college study. However, among study participants interaction between collegiate involvement and family could not be linked with particular family patterns. Both part-time and full-time adult students came from families with the *same* patterns: single, divorced, and single or married with children of all ages.

Third, child care responsibilities have been assumed to limit a woman's ability to engage in undergraduate study. The complexity and variability in the experiences of women participants in this study challenged this common assumption. Women with children added the college student role to their lives during virtually all phases of their children's development. Some waited until their children reached late adolescence, others waited only until their children entered the public school system, and still others assumed the student role when children moved beyond infancy. And divorced women who needed to find employment, and were pressed to acquire entry level job skills, were often forced to disregard their children's developmental level when deciding to enter college. Thus the same variable—"children"—is viewed as both an impediment to undergraduate study and a reason for engaging in such study.

These examples of research and common assumptions in the literature on adult college students have had limited utility in expanding understanding of adult collegiate involvement. It is clear from the findings of this study that the interrelationship between adult family life and undergraduate study is highly diverse and complex. Such diversity has often been masked in prior research on adult undergraduates (Kasworm, 1990a).

Despite the diversity and complexity, common themes characterizing the adult collegiate experience in the context of family life clearly revealed the pivotal influence of the family on collegiate involvement. As one adult college student noted,

> Everybody from my mother and father-in-law to my parents and...the wife and the children...just everybody has helped and I was given a lot of encouragement. [They all] helped in any way they could. I've noticed that the students that seem to have the family's support — even beyond the wife, especially at my age where you have children — they seem to stay around the longest. You know, they're not in and out [of college]. They get into it and just finish it.

Four themes emerged in the participants' discussions of the interaction between family life and undergraduate study. The first dealt with the elusive goal of successfully balancing family roles and the demands of the student role. Because few rules or precepts existed to guide how one's time and energy should be divided between student and family roles, these adults found a continual need for negotiation between family and student roles. Second, these adults spoke of their family's commitment to supporting their collegiate study as a sacrificial act. The costs to them and their family were not limited merely to financial hardships, but affected a wide range of family relationships. Third, these adult students saw their degree pursuit as a partnership between themselves and their family members, and especially between themselves and their spouses. Finally, they viewed their children as long-term beneficiaries of their collegiate educational experience.

Balance Is an Elusive Goal

The emphasis in this section of the chapter will be on the effects felt within the family when time and energy typically belonging to family roles and tasks were instead spent on school-related tasks. Goode (1960) noted that "the individual's problem is how to make his [or her] whole role system manageable" (p. 485). These adults had the greatest difficulty in balancing family and school. Managing work was rarely a problem because work was commonly seen as the first priority in their lives. The greatest number of decisions related to distributing time and energy satisfactorily between school and family responsibilities. In making daily decisions, these adults were forced to choose among mutually exclusive but equally desirable behaviors when they used family time for school. They frequently used the images of "juggling" and "balancing" to describe the processes involved in making these decisions. A Bayville student commented, "I'm pulled in so many different directions. You can't keep 'em balanced. You give some and neglect some and then you turn the tables. There's no fifty-fifty — at least in my life."

Participants perceived themselves to have the greatest freedom to choose among a number of options within the bounds of their set of family roles. On a daily basis, choices had to be made as to which roles would receive priority and which would not. The choices were not easily made.

> It is not having enough time—being torn between feeling like I should be studying or needing to be at my daughter's school or something—[or needing to be] in class at the same time. [Delta]
>
> It's hard because I WANT to go [to my son's oration contest] ...and I missed his spelling bee...so I may miss class next week so I can go to that. You know, [my children] need me too. I feel like they're being slighted. [Bayville]

Students set priorities at one point, but found themselves continually reevaluating them. One parent based some decisions regarding the allocation of family and school time on the basis of long-term effects.

> I have to make a decision, do I give up the family day or do I settle for [a lower grade], ...and I've opted to spend time with family...but then I look at it and say, "Well, 15 or 20 years from now which one am I going to look back and regret, ...that I made a B in that course or that we spent that day playing?" [Charles]

Some seemed to have a sense of boundaries that guided them when they were approaching the point of challenging the limits of time that could be borrowed from the family.

> It's a gnawing feeling because I can't just constantly tell my wife, "Well I can't do that."...There comes a point...even though they understand it and [are] very supportive, they're disappointed. And you feel pressure just from that....You sit there and calculate out, "Well, what is my priority here?" It's a question you're asking constantly. [Charles]

These adult undergraduates experienced discomfort, pain, and frustration when they were forced to place family in a secondary role. Feelings of guilt, anger, and regret were a common response when the student was no longer able to fulfill a family role in the same way he or she had in the past. A Delta student who was also a mother said,

> [My kids are] a big guilt thing with me...'Cause I take night classes and even though it's only two or three nights a week and there's seven days in a week, there's still guilt for me that I'm not there. Or when you're walking out the door and you have, "Mommy, don't go to class!"—and the leaving is harder....And I think all mothers have that a lot. [Delta]

A full-time male student at Elmwood noted that no longer being the "family provider" disturbed him.

> I was willing to work on a part time job and...[my wife] just didn't think it would be a very good idea [to take time away from studying]. And [that] was part of my guilt thing. [Elmwood]

Some students struggled to maintain previous roles.

> I do all the things [my teenage daughter] needs me to do, but sometimes I am really angry about it....I needed to study for a test...and I'm supposed to drop her friend off [and] it's an hour [drive]...and I kept trying to [control my anger] and placate her. [Delta]

None of the participants were satisfied with the resulting compromises they needed to make, but none could identify a solution other than postponing family needs. Some adults spoke of "putting everything on hold," and putting things "on the back burner."

Some justified taking family time for school because they felt it was now "their turn." These adults seemed to experience less guilt and discomfort in devoting time and energy to their education because they had previously spent their personal family resources on behalf of others.

> I always felt like I would get [my degree], but I used to tell myself that it's not my time. Every time that I would start [college and not finish], I'd say, "It'll be your turn someday." [I knew] that I was going to raise my kids [first] and [I] have. [Allerton]

One father, who had supported his children's undergraduate and graduate education, expressed the feeling that he had paid his dues to other family members.

> When is it my turn?...Both kids [are] degreed people. I look at them and say, "Wait a minute! Why are you continuing to get graduate degrees and I never got any [type of degree]?" [Bayville]

Adult students used multiple strategies to deal with these decisional conflicts. One of the most effective was to set aside certain times and places for the performance of a single role. Conflicting demands could be met in that *some* time at least had been set aside for family responsibilities. Scheduling could be facilitated by setting aside large blocks of time. "To have a full day that's not interrupted by school or to have a full school day that's not interrupted by the other [demands of family life] suits me just fine" [Fremont]. Once the scheduled time arrived, the adult proceeded to concentrate on the appropriate family role. One parent noted, "I would set aside time when I was focused on my children. It wasn't as much as I would have liked for it to have been." Careful scheduling also facilitated allocation of available resources among multiple family tasks:

> I always put on the calendar when my things [or my children's things] are due, so I can glance at a whole month and...that way I can space out study time or try to space out laundry time...I like to know in advance. [Bayville]

Some adults found it necessary to acquire new organizational skills in order to mesh family life and school.

> Basically what I did in order to change my habits was to re-read the book about time management. And I applied some of the techniques in there, which was basically writing down a day by day schedule...and you maintain the schedule until it becomes [a habit] and that's basically what I did. [Charles]

Creating specific links between student and family roles was another means of coping. Involving family members directly in student-related activities was one approach to counteract the limitation of family time created by school and one way to resolve some of the decisional and behavioral conflict these adults felt.

> My youngest [child] is ten and he helps me study....For a while I had a problem with them. They thought I was spending more time with school than with them. But since I have involved them in my studying, it's really helped them understand more. [Bayville]

Some parents worked to involve their children in their undergraduate efforts in order to increase the children's understanding of what the parent did when they were away from home. Campus visits were common parent/child activities that helped in this regard.

Sacrifice

Family members most often responded to the adult student's new role by taking over many of their home responsibilities. In the majority of cases, the spouse was called upon to make the major adjustments while the student spouse pursued undergraduate study. Sometimes this was a very heavy load of responsibility.

> The biggest thing is probably the willingness...of the non-student spouse, to carry the entire load all the time....My oldest is only 12. My youngest is retarded, so he's a much heavier obligation for my wife...and she's still done that without a break. That's tough....it's sacrifice....[My] father and mother-in-law don't [even] understand....what it takes from a family to do this. [Charles]

In the process of transferring responsibilities to other family members and altering usual role performances, these adult students often experienced a shift in their position within the family. Some mothers referred to this shift as not being "the same mother." Yielding family responsibilities to others essentially moved these adult students more toward the periphery of the family while other family members, especially spouses, moved more toward the center. This shift was bolstered by the adult's absence from family activities and isolation from other family members when they were at home studying. Adult students no longer shared their usual time with their children, spouses and extended family members.

> Before I started college, I did a lot of things with my family....And they weren't used to me saying, "No, I can't do that."...I know they were jeopardized to a certain extent for me....They were willing, but you could see it hurt them sometimes that you couldn't do things with them — especially my children. And it got to where I was having to call [my parents to check on them]; I didn't have time to stop. I think [school] takes away from your work to a small extent, but not like it does from your family and yourself. [Allerton]

Families with young children often made major shifts in parental responsibilities. These adjustments were not easily made however. Because young children lacked a full understanding of the parent's new school-related responsibilities, they tended to behave as they always had. One mother noted,

> The kids don't understand. And because they're always used to coming to me for everything, even though my husband was home, they would just automatically come and ...hunt me down [where I was studying] to tell me so and so in their class had lost a tooth. [Delta]

Even if children were able to make some changes in their responses to parents, it was often difficult to maintain the altered relationship.

> At first [my children] supported me. When I would go in my little office at night and close the door they wouldn't bother me....After about eight or nine months they were like, "When are you going to finish school?" — and just whine and whine — "We want to spend time with you." [Allerton]

Student parents hoped that if their children understood the student role, they would be more willing to accept the parent's absence. One Allerton student noted, "My son would go to study groups with me quite often. . . . Once I got him kind of involved in it, he was better."

> [When I was taking algebra] we got out my graph paper...and [I] showed them x and y coordinates and...the coordinates would come out in some shape and so they thought that was really neat at the end when they'd connect the dots....What I end up doing is little things where I just use [school knowledge]...to let them know... what I'm kind of doing, so they'll understand. [Bayville]

Children who didn't demand the parent's attention or who *accepted* the parent's absence were thus seen as *supportive*.

Some parents needed to pursue their bachelor's degree out of economic necessity even though they depleted the amount of time needed to guide their children's development. This group consisted predominantly of single parents with school age children. The parent's time commitment to school often meant that children had to assume much greater responsibility for running the household. One single mother noted, "I had no support from my children [to enter college] because they knew I was going to have to give up being a full-time mom and that they were going to have to start shouldering some responsibilities." One single parent found that she needed to shift many home management responsibilities to her young daughter. In this instance, the daughter responded in a very mature manner.

> [She] helps me out around the house a whole lot. At the age of ten she feels [responsible]...for her own brother. She stays home with him...She cleans like an adult — you won't believe. She does the laundry....she will vacuum and do everything. So, it's like a great big help. I never come back to a dirty house. [Elmwood]

Single parents also found that they often had to exert a high degree of self-sacrifice. Their daily schedules were filled to the maximum with no other adult family member to share responsibilities.

> Well I'm a carpenter. I get up at 3:00 AM every morning and study till 5:30 AM. Then I get my two-year-old up, dressed and to the sitter by 6:00 AM. I work till 2:00 PM, and come here to the university till 7:00 PM and...go home and...make dinner. Then I get the two boys a bath, cause I have a six-year-old son too. And the next morning it starts again. [Delta single father]

> From the time I get up in the morning till the time I go to bed at night, it's something....It's like being on a merry-go-round. Sometimes I feel like it's spinning so fast that I'm going to fly off and smash into the wall somewhere. [Bayville single mother]

While the single adult family pattern might be expected to demand the fewest sacrifices, even single adults experienced notable sacrifices. In addition to decreasing the time spent with extended family members, single adult students found time for school by significantly altering personal leisure time. Almost all spoke of a complete lack of personal, private time or time to engage in leisure or relaxation.

> Before coming back to school, I always had time for my employer, time for my family, and then time for me. Well, now I've cut out the "me" time. That's totally gone. [Allerton]

Singles reported giving up most or all of their social life, time spent watching television, recreational or competitive sports, nonacademic reading, and community involvement as well as virtually all types of extended family interaction and activities. Most indeed abandoned all activities in their lives that were not absolutely mandatory, even those they felt were vitally important.

These "forced choices" between school and socially legitimate and even necessary roles, such as that of spouse and parent, extracted a high price from these adult undergraduates. This high personal cost seems to relate to the "seriousness" of adult undergraduates. When they spoke of their perceptions of the classroom and their college involvement, they often contrasted their strong commitment and seriousness with that of the traditional student. The typical young student made fewer sacrifices, they observed, and generally exhibited a weaker level of commitment to learning.

Families sacrificed many of their normal activities to accommodate the addition of school. One student decided to defer some work in order to manage schoolwork, but the family then had to sacrifice some of their normal holiday time so the parent could catch up at work. "I'll let [some work] go and I'll fall a little behind there [but] during the holidays I'll catch up. So you end up giving up some of your holidays."

In addition to family and personal sacrifices, participants noted that there were financial sacrifices associated with involvement in higher education for both families and single adults.

> At 35 years old, you know, you can't go out and get a student loan like you can when you're under 35. I mean, they've even got you on age now....You borrow; you cut back; you put your children and your family under immense pressure. [Fremont]

> If you make more than 10 or 12 thousand a year you could still not save a dime but you don't qualify for anything. So, I basically sold the house and a little bit of the money from that will help go for a year or so...creative financing is just juggling anyway you can to make it. [Fremont]

Thus the family unit was the locus of sacrifices made to support the adult's involvement in undergraduate study. The normal division of labor in the family was altered. Spouses often took on an additional load of heavy responsibility. Children lost a portion of the parent's contribution to their growth and development. The adult student gave up participation in normal family activities. Financial, emotional and physical resources were strained. And a great deal of family effort went into sustaining the motivation and morale of the adult student who was dealing with role change and continued role negotiation. Single adults and parents without partners also experienced sacrifices, including career-related risks and financial hardships.

One graduating adult looking back over the period of undergraduate study, wondered whether the sacrifice and the price had been too extravagant.

> I didn't realize how time consuming [college] would be when I started, and had I have realized it, I'm not sure I would have [gone] back. I didn't like taking away from my family; that's time you can never bring back. You have to look and balance it out and was it really worth it? That's a hard call to make. At this point [graduation] I'm not really sure how I would make that call....I didn't realize when I started what price I was going to have to pay. [Allerton]

Partnership

The spousal role was particularly significant for adult undergraduates. The majority of married students conceived of their spouses as their partners in degree pursuit and viewed the spouse's contribution as equal to their own. These participants felt their spouses' support was so important that it was almost essential to their participation.

> I've been very fortunate in that my wife has been extremely supportive—couldn't have done it without her. She's graduating too, figuratively. [Charles]

This view was verified by a small subgroup that described a lack of spousal support and two who experienced active opposition during a prior episode of collegiate involvement. Those without spousal support experienced elevated levels of stress and a serious undermining of their ability to participate as collegians. All members of this subgroup subsequently interrupted their prior degree pursuit but, after gaining spousal support through remarriage, were able to reenter and become successful undergraduates.

Another small set of the married participants lacked *overt* spousal support. This subgroup described their spouse's responses as "neutral" characterized by subtle signs of agreement with the student's collegiate involvement. These adults struggled to remain involved and hoped for more overt spousal support and approval to develop. Their minimal support at home led them to seek support and approval from other family members or friends in order to sustain them in their studies.

One key component of the student/spouse partnership was the spouse's understanding. Understanding was a multi-faceted response. Components included a willingness to forgo time and attention from the student and the deliberate rearrangement of their schedules. Understanding also meant daily kindness and consideration while interacting with the student who was usually trying to study; spouses avoided creating study distractions. They also communicated that they had a realistic appraisal of the time needed for studying and paper writing. They fully expected the student spouse to be absorbed with a paper or studying for an exam for lengthy periods of time. One Elmwood student described his wife's support.

> She's always asking how I'm doing and she's always very encouraging. She's always bragging on me to her family....She tries to do all the housework [and cooking]....She's very considerate....So, she's very supportive in most every way you can possibly think of.

Spouse partners sometimes helped to maintain the student's morale by tolerating interpersonal clashes related to the student's increased stress.

> [My husband got] the brunt of my stress — where I was just freaked out because I wasn't ready for the test and it was the next day and I was going to have to get up early in the morning and study for it. He knew when he came home from work that night that...we were going to have some kind of frozen something for dinner. [Delta]

Spouses supported the partnership by allowing the student spouse to alter his/her role performance in order to accommodate the student role. These alterations were often accepted by the non-student spouse because (s)he shared the student's attitudes about the importance of education. This sharing was in itself supportive. One Fremont student noted,

> It can go either way as husband or wife....She might cook or something and normally I help with the dishes....It's hard for me to study knowing that the dishes are there and that it's my responsibility....So, it goes both ways. It's the willingness of [the spouse] not thinking that you can do the studying and go to class at the same time and keeping up the normal roles that you would if you weren't in school.

Other types of spousal support included very practical financial and behavioral support. Nearly one-fifth of the participants indicated that their husbands or wives assisted them financially with school-related expenses. Practical means of support were primarily tied to shifts in the family's division of labor; the non-student spouse took over child care, provided transportation to and from school when needed, took on added responsibility for meals, assumed bill paying activities, typed papers, listened to rehearsals of class presentations, and helped the spouse study for tests.

Spouse partners also helped to maintain the student's motivation by recognizing their educational achievement. They often praised grades or even posted them on the refrigerator. A sense of partnership was fostered by a spouse's active interest. This was revealed when the supporting spouse asked questions about degree progress or class assignments. This kind of active interest was interpreted as evidence that the partner shared the student's attitudes about the importance of the student role. Decreased family time, however, stressed the marital relationship. Spouses supported the student and the marriage when they sought the student's company without demanding conversation or without demanding attention. One creative spouse joined the student who was studying and watched television using earphones.

Flexibility was also a highly valued trait of a supportive partner. This usually involved adjusting to the student's altered load of responsibility with minimal signs of stress. The flexible partner freely changed his or her own role behavior on behalf of the student spouse.

Partnerships between husband and wife in support of collegiate involvement took a number of forms depending on the nature of role shifts. For some couples, it involved substituting the collegiate role for the usual work role. Families with children often switched wage earner *and* major child care roles. Thus, more than a simple role-for-role exchange was involved. Husbands who were adult students often also took on a new role as major caregiver for the children. One formerly employed father assumed the role of full-time college student, switched wage earner roles with his spouse, and added a new child care role.

> I take care of my two children...and my son's a home schooler. So, I teach during the day....So, I had to make that adjustment as well....So, I had to figure out what [I was] going to do about that. [Charles]

Male students who assumed the primary care role for their children spoke of meeting family needs as the first priority and of school as their second or at least equal priority.

> Because my wife does work and I don't—if it means waiting until two or three hours later to study, I try to have dinner ready and get the clothes clean and my baby fed and then I'll take that time in the evening to study. [Delta]

Couples without child care responsibilities were able to achieve the student and work role shift with greater ease. As one noted,

> Well, I still try to take care of the house and the yard. My wife works 40 hours a week...So, I guess we sort of reversed the roles. I make sure the house stays clean, keep things running and bills paid and that sort of thing and she just goes to work. Then when she comes home, she kind of keeps the aggravations away from me and I use that time to study. I guess with the two of us there is not a whole lot to do around there; it is not a Mr. Mom type thing. [Delta]

Single parents, when their own parents were willing, sometimes established a partial partnership with them. These students recognized the critical significance of their extended family in their educational process. One divorced student commented about her parents,

> My parents...they're just there, anything I need. I know a lot of parents that are not willing to help. I mean, I've got a baby sitter when I need one; if my

> car breaks down as it did today [they help me]....If I've got to study for a test...my parents take my kids and do extracurricular things with them....If it was not for my parents, I could not go to school. I mean, it's not that I couldn't, but it would make it ten times harder. [Elmwood]

Grandparents provided support most often by assuming child care responsibilities. This was especially important not only for divorced parents, but also for men who had experienced role reversal and drastically altered their parental role by assuming the bulk of child care in the family. One such father commented,

> [It means] going over to your in-laws' and your parents' house and sitting down with a book and saying, "Hello. I need to be here for a few minutes; my [two-year-old] son's here. I know you don't want to see us, but he's going to play for a while and I'm going to study and we're going to kind of keep our eye on him." That's time right there. [Fremont]

In some cases children were more actively involved in supporting the parent by accepting a new division of labor within the family. This was especially true for older children who took over selected parental home management activities, such as the supervision of younger siblings, lawn mowing, cleaning or meal preparation. Sometimes they were also able to assist a parent in study activities. Study activities included such things as quizzing the parent from flash cards in preparation for a test or making photocopies of materials the parent needed for an assignment. While students with older children did not form a full partnership with them, some attempted to involve them in their collegiate role. One student parent spoke of involving a teenager by instilling a sense of "ownership" for the parent's degree.

> Before we started the degree, we talked about it. And I told him, "Son, I can't do this by myself. I've got to have your help."...I let him do things for me that makes him feel like [the degree's] more his. I let him do a lot of my printing for me....I took astronomy [and] took him over every day to class....When I got ready to study, he got to prompt me....So it's his degree since he's invested this whole summer...When he has a part in seeing that something [happens], it belongs to him. It gives him more of an ownership in the degree too. [Allerton]

Children as Beneficiaries

Parents generally felt that their educational experiences were a wise investment in their children's future. They expected their children to benefit in several ways. Study participants viewed their student role as a model to be emulated by their children, one of seriousness, commitment, and diligence. They felt that their example might enable their children to avoid making educational mistakes.

> Once I get my degree I won't emphasize to my children that their father was so late getting his degree, but I do want to emphasize to them how important it is to get their degree at a young age. [Charles]

Many also felt that they were models for nieces or nephews or other youngsters in their extended family. A love of learning and related activities could also be modeled.

> My kids, they see me in school. They see my wife and I—we're always reading....they think that that's how life is supposed to be lived—doing home work, staying in college, always bettering yourself. And so that's a very positive thing to me. [Elmwood]
>
> And it seemed to help [my son] to really focus on his school work and to realize that there are some things that are not going to be much fun to learn, but there are other things that are going to be a lot of fun. [Charles]

Through adult undergraduate pursuits, children could be exposed to higher education and develop a desire for collegiate involvement for themselves.

> I think it [being a college student] will make them really want to go to college....I try to be a role model for them. I see they don't mind doing their homework when I'm doing my homework and I think it's made a big difference in their life. I think they appreciate the opportunities that they have for going to school and what they can learn from going to school. [Fremont]

Some parents, whose older children had previously expressed no interest in college or had indicated negative opinions about attending, hoped that such children would have negative educational attitudes changed by viewing their parent's collegiate involvement. As an example, one parent described an exceptional professor who actively involved the student's children in a classroom activity. Her oldest son was so impressed by the experience that he saved the notes he took during the class for months afterward. She noted that this experience combined with her example as a student had changed her children's perception of college. Now they frequently spoke of what they would do when they "went to college."

Parents also noted that they were better prepared to assist their own children with homework and assignments. College had increased their own knowledge base and broadened and deepened their understandings which allowed them to assist their children. This was particularly apparent in the areas of math and science. And children were enriched when the parent was able to share their new knowledge of campus resources with them. They spoke of helping their children with school assignments by accessing college or university library materials or computer networks. Cultural exhibits and speakers were also shared with children as well as sporting and social events.

Adult college students found the interactions between student and family roles to be complex. Virtually all family tasks were affected by the adult's collegiate involvement and many experienced major role changes within the family structure itself, in addition to adding the student role to their lives. The majority of the family's resources were reallocated to meet the demands of the student role. The division of labor within the family was significantly altered in order to allow the student to spend time and energy on study, learning, and class attendance. Children's daily nurturing was sometimes temporarily postponed in deference to collegiate demands. However, children were perceived to benefit in the long run. These adults assumed that involvement in higher education would ultimately equip them to make greater contributions to their family and society at large.

These adults wanted to achieve some sort of balance between their family life and their student involvement. Balancing the two was seen as desirable. However, balance proved to be an elusive goal that was extremely short lived, if it was achieved. Most often family needs were temporarily set aside for variable periods of time until the student could find additional time to meet them. Another alternative was to settle for a different level of role performance, one that required less time and energy. Such a shift could be openly discussed and negotiated with a spouse and older children. Younger children, however, simply had to learn to adjust to an altered parental role. There were no common or well-accepted guidelines which could assist the adult student to choose among the different family behaviors and school-related actions. Decisions were based on shifting priorities determined by individual adults according to their unique circumstances. However, the establishment of a well-organized routine helped to make the decision process less time consuming and at least assured that neither family nor student-related needs were disregarded.

The high costs of collegiate involvement were felt especially deeply within the family structure. All types of family patterns were associated with collegiate attendance among study participants with sacrifices occurring to varying degrees within each type. The more the members of a family, the greater the degree of sacrifice in most instances, since everyone involved paid a price. Family members sacrificed many aspects of their relationships with adult students, gave up their own time and energy to assist the student and often did without family resources such as money in order for the adult to be involved as a college student.

Spouses especially were vital partners in the student's degree pursuit. Their support was emotional, social, financial, and practical in nature and involved major realignments in role tasks and responsibilities. These realignments were usually negotiated together with the student spouse. When a spouse was absent, other family members could also become partners with the student. Usually other adults from the extended family were involved, but even young children could be limited partners when they accepted a student parent's household management tasks as their own.

Children's sacrifices of parental time and guidance were often seen as acceptable in view of the long-term benefits they would ultimately receive through their parent's positive example. Sometimes children were immediately benefitted when a parent could promote school achievement through college-gained knowledge.

Maintaining the integrity of the family role remained a powerful motivator for most of these adult students. Their educational persistence and high morale in the face of multiple changes and sacrifices were facilitated and indeed made possible by the support and commitment given by their families.

THE ADULT UNDERGRADUATE AS WORKER

Introduction

Work not only provides income, but also offers opportunities to meet challenges, acquire and demonstrate competencies, validate self-esteem and engage in social interaction. Henry (1971) notes that participation in family, community and work roles interact throughout the life cycle, but that work exerts a commanding influence on the structuring of family and community life. In the case of study participants, it is evident that work exerts a commanding influence on collegiate involvement as well. Work was explored with participants primarily in terms of the adult students' typical responsibilities and their relationships with supervisors and fellow workers. The majority of participants felt that their role as worker was the least negotiable of all their roles.

Schor (1992) notes that "we have become a harried working, rather than leisure class, as jobs take up an ever larger part of ever more Americans' lives" (p. 24). She supports this conclusion with "the first comprehensive calculations of work time spanning the last two decades" (p. 28). According to Schor, the calculations hold true across income categories, family patterns (with and without children; married and not married) and across industries and occupations. Her figures indicate that in the last 20 years, men have gained an extra 98 hours per year of work time and women an extra 305 hours. The American worker now spends one additional month per year on the job (Schor, 1992). Further, weekly schedules are lengthening, and moonlighting and overtime are on the rise.

Study participants generally echoed this picture. The majority reported working 50 hours a week or more. Many routinely put in 10 to 12 hour days; a few worked up to 16 hours a day. Overtime was common among study participants and mandatory for some. One participant described a particularly difficult period when overtime work hours and school demands reduced sleeping time to 2 or 3 hours a night. Moonlighting, however, was mentioned by only one participant.

Participants' work affected both initiation of collegiate involvement and its continuance. Not only did work-related motives provide the initial extrinsic push for a majority of these adults to initiate degree pursuit or to continue study begun in young adulthood, these work motives also supported continued involvement. In addition, the amount of time available for collegiate involvement was based on the type of work and the number of work hours. Time for college attendance frequently became available when the usual full-time work role was altered voluntarily or involuntarily.

Years ago, Knox (1977) noted that "traditional views of occupational choice and establishment as a one-time process that occurs early in young adulthood are gradually giving way to a recognition that occupational development occurs during much of adulthood" (p. 191). Further, the changing occupational structure inevitably involves adults in a number of career changes which often demand new sets of skills and abilities. This was amply illustrated by study participants. A number have already changed careers or were anticipating a voluntary career change in the future. Others were displaced workers seeking the degree as a means of retraining, former members of the military who were also retraining, and first-time work force entrants who were becoming primary wage earners.

Across the participant group as a whole, occupational changes and involvement in higher education went hand in hand. Those who had lost jobs due to company downsizing sought credentials to gain jobs with comparable salaries; some sought knowledge and skills for career changes or initial entry into a specific profession. In addition, many judged the worth of their educational programs in light of the perceived connections between the program and work. Some wanted "practical" degrees that would translate directly into the work place; others sought a specific degree that was valued by their employer in order to enhance their worth to an organization and thereby increase their job security. Favored programs were judged by their ability to enhance work performance. Further, when study participants talked about the connections between their learning and their other life roles, work was most often mentioned as the arena for the application of their classroom knowledge and skills.

There were four prominent themes focused on work linked to degree pursuit. The first and most dominant was that participants saw work as the priority of their lives, nearly superseding all other roles. Given the centrality of work, factors in the work place played a vital role in collegiate involvement. Second, a work place environment that was "student friendly" provided valuable assistance to the adult student. In the case of financial assistance in the form of tuition aid programs, the employer played an essential role. The majority of these participants took advantage of employer tuition assistance programs and saw these programs as an important benefit. Estimates of employee use of tuition reimbursement programs range from 7 to 10 percent (Shalowitz, 1990; Williams & Williamson, 1985). Third, these adults clearly perceived the bachelor's degree to be a work force imperative. Fourth, participants, especially those in middle management, often detected a social hierarchy at work based on the prestige of a four-year degree.

Work Is the Central Focus of Adult Life

Full-time participant workers usually described weekly work demands in this manner:

> I generally work from 5:00 in the morning to 5:00 or 5:30 in the afternoons for most of the week and usually Saturdays. School is [Monday and] Tuesday night....That leaves me free to stay at work later [the rest of the week]. I have cut back some since I started school, but I generally work 60 to 70 hours a week. Time-wise, [school's] been fairly tough to fit in. [Allerton]

One participant commented, "First of all, my job comes first. That's how it is. There's no [leeway]. Your job comes before your family. That's it. Your job comes first — whatever else is secondary. That's their policy" [Elmwood]. Another participant added insight into the normative role pressures in the work setting.

> I have worked in companies for years and realize that the company will take everything that you give. And you cannot feel guilty 'cause you almost [do] give everything. They will let you do that gladly....And I guess at some point you have to...determine exactly how much commitment you are willing to make toward the company. [Allerton]

Only a few participants reported that they had supervisors who eased their job-related responsibilities because they were college students. A few participants whose jobs involved travel reported that they spent less time travelling since becoming a student. A few also noted that they had pulled back from involvement in new projects at work. The majority of these adults, however, indicated that there had been no changes in work responsibilities or hours since they began school and two even reported increased hours and responsibilities.

The primacy of work in their lives affected participants' student role enactment. These adults rarely spoke of conflicts between family and work roles. They spoke of the necessity of work in meeting their family's needs and seemed to feel that this priority settled the matter of conflict between work and family. However, school and work conflicts were frequent. Many of these adult students had experienced times when both school and work could not be managed. The most common outcome was for school to be temporarily set aside. One participant who recently temporarily interrupted his current period of collegiate involvement noted,

> As far as responsibilities, we have our little business, my wife and I, that we started a few months ago. And that, also, had conflict with school. So, I'm giving myself a little break from school to see how that's going to go. [Fremont]

A number of participants found time for college attendance when their work role was altered in some way. Some were no longer full-time workers because they had lost their jobs through downsizing. Others had been faced with relocation and had chosen to leave a company rather than move. When a new job involved a reduction in the number of hours worked per week and a new location made educational institutions geographically accessible, time for school became available for some.

Given the centrality of work in their lives, it is not surprising that some adult students were concerned about the length of time required to earn their bachelor's degree. They were especially concerned that as older adults, they would have less work life to make use of the degree. Because of this, several opted to stop full-time work and become a full-time student in order to earn the degree in less time. However, this increased their risks in a different manner.

> I put my career on hold. I worry about—if I stay out of the business for a couple of years — are people going to forget me? Am I going to lose my place in the [professional] community? [Delta]

Work also determined the allocation of time for studying and completing papers and other class assignments. It was imperative for many participants to complete course assignments in advance of due dates because "you never know what will come up at work." One noted, "I had an exam one time last semester that I worked the night before until midnight. Which means if I didn't know the material before that night I was in trouble" [Charles]. Another noted,

> I worked 36 hours and spent about six hours commuting [this weekend]. Consequently I didn't have a chance to do but about five hours [school] work. I like to know what's coming up, because [if] the teacher comes up and surprises you [you may not have time to compensate]...I may be scheduled to work. [Delta]

Instructors who grasped the demands of the work world were especially valued by these adult undergraduates. For example, no participant indicated that they planned to miss even one class, but indicated that they were occasionally late to class or forced to miss a class because of non-negotiable work responsibilities. Instructors who did not penalize them for these work-related absences showed understanding.

The "Student Friendly" Workplace

The employment setting sometimes served as an important enabler for students. A significant number of participants relied on the financial assistance available through tuition reimbursement programs, but practical and motivational types of support were also important. Practical support and encouragement were given directly to student employees by immediate supervisors and others in their work environment. A company or firm was perceived as supportive in the general sense when tuition assistance was available. Support was made visible through the actions of specific individuals within the student employee's immediate work environment.

The student's supervisor communicated support in the work setting by offering practical assistance, by verbally encouraging the student's involvement and asking about progress, and by clearly communicating that education was a valued asset within the employment setting. Praising educational accomplishments was one means of supporting a student employee's personal growth. A supportive supervisor was viewed as an enabler by the adult student. However, even a laissez-faire supervisor was perceived as supportive when the student was free to study after completing scheduled work.

Those who viewed education positively actively sought to remove work-related obstacles which might interfere with college involvement. This was illustrated by the supervisor who promoted degree pursuit at higher administrative levels. This selling job produced a pro-education atmosphere in the work setting that supported the participant. Logistic support included providing access to company computers outside of work hours or willingly scheduling a vacation day to provide extra study time.

> My next level of supervision in my department and my department superintendent were both very supportive of my going back to school. If there was

> anything that they could do or help me with or I needed access to, or that they could provide, they would always do that. I was fortunate; a lot of people's supervisors would not let them use the computers, would not help them in anyway. I was fortunate that both of my supervisors felt that [school] was worthwhile. [Allerton]

Participants often chose part-time work in order to have more flexible time in support of collegiate involvement. Even when employment was on a part-time basis and less dominant in terms of its time demands and position of centrality in a student's life, a supportive supervisor could make an important contribution to the student's success.

> [My boss is] very understanding....he's worked everybody else's schedule around me. He knows every quarter...the times that I'm going to be in school, and he never calls or asks me to do any of the work during those periods of time. Basically I told him I wouldn't be available and that [work] was going to be kind of second on my priority list of things to do. And he's accepted that. [Elmwood]

Other aspects of the work environment also helped the student to succeed. Some employers were active in helping a student/employee understand course material.

> When I have problems [my boss will] draw me charts and I hang them up in my office so I can look at them. He's very supportive in helping me with all my school work. [And I can use the reference materials at work] any time. [Charles]

Most participants indicated that work peers or colleagues had a neutral response to their collegiate involvement.

> It's funny because they're aware of what I'm doing. And I think they're a little bit in awe...They don't understand why I'm taking the time to do this. I'm not talking about my boss, but I'm talking about the people I work with on a day to day [basis]. [Charles]

Some peers, however, were uncomfortable with the adult student's educational efforts. Another Charles student noted,

> I see prejudices towards me from people who have not furthered their education. It's as though—"Well, she thinks she's somewhat better because she's getting an education!"...I don't like that kind of reaction from people and I don't feel like I'm purposely trying to give them that sort of a feeling at all.

The financial assistance provided by employers was a major means of support for nearly all the students in the two adult degree programs in the private liberal arts colleges, for many at the public universities, and for a few who attended community colleges.

Employer financial assistance supported participants' freedom to pursue this important personal goal of degree attainment. However, this support gave the employer at least a silent voice in the employee's academic performance. Some spoke of "getting my money's worth" indicating that the personal pronoun "my" referred to their employer. Others felt that the employer should be the primary beneficiary of their learning and the recipient of enhanced talents and abilities.

The subset of participants who worked in manufacturing, however, found this environment to be far less supportive of collegiate involvement. Even when tuition aid programs existed as an explicit policy in the employment setting, these were often not widely publicized. Some employees were asked to postpone applying for such financial assistance; when they did apply, some found that the application process itself was daunting. The group of adult students involved in such work environments found it especially difficult to reconcile work and school.

> I'm in a manufacturing environment and...I get a downside from...my fellow colleagues at work because my company...[doesn't] have an avenue for advancing through training. You have people there that look at me and some talk about me under their breath....They're not looking any further than [their current job] and I'm looking at...higher goals. [Charles]

A few students in this type of work setting also described what they perceived as active discrimination because of their college involvement.

> It's kind of touchy for me....I have never yet gotten a pay increase. The people that I started with at the same time—my work quality, work habits, and everything has always been better than theirs—have gotten...pay increases....[I've] learned...[that] every [worker] who started going to school...got treated real bad. It's very discriminating. They don't give students promotions; they don't give pay increases to students. Once they find out you're going to school or something, that's it....And that's what I'm experiencing now. [Elmwood]

Some supervisors involved in the approval process for tuition reimbursement discriminated by delaying the tuition reimbursement application or by actively disparaging educational efforts.

> My boss discouraged education altogether....When I gave them a tuition assistance form to initial, [he'd say] "What do you want to go to school for?"...Now that I'm graduated, he still hasn't acknowledged it. He's kind of set in his very old fashioned ways — that women shouldn't be educated. [Allerton graduate]

The Degree as a Work Force Imperative

These adults found they were already living in the work world of the future where, for the first time in history, the majority of jobs require some postsecondary education (Johnston, 1987). They sought a bachelor's to enhance their upward mobility at work, to get and keep well-paying jobs, to find comparable work after a forced layoff, to access job applicant pools for desired jobs, to remain competitive in the marketplace, and to attain a credential that validated their knowledge and skill. They also pursued their degrees to meet entry requirements for a profession they wished to practice or to retrain for a different occupational field. While the majority of participants who were performing well in their current jobs had no doubt about their abilities to perform at even higher levels, they suddenly found that their educational credentials were apparently the single most important factor in promotion decisions.

Some participants, especially those in white collar and middle management positions, perceived the bachelor's degree as mandatory. They felt that employers used this degree and even the master's degree as a kind of gatekeeping device to control admittance to certain positions and that degrees had come to be the major criteria for judging a potential employee's qualifications.

> And even with the amount of on-the-job experience that I have, I would be discriminated against without a degree. I HAVE been discriminated against without a degree. Though that sounds negative, it [motivates me to get] a degree. [Allerton]

Employer use of the degree as a screening device and as a gatekeeping device is described in the following two comments.

> One company I went to was saying, "Hey, we'd love to hire you, but..." They said if I was working on a degree more compatible, then they would hire me. So, it's rough. [Elmwood]

> But I'm not sure if you get [a master's degree], [employers] won't say, "Well, your master's isn't enough. You don't have the right [one]....I'm not sure at what point...they can't say, "Well, you're not qualified." [Allerton]

Sometimes an adult student's motivation for collegiate involvement was primarily an extrinsic motivation related to achieving a social or work status currently denied them. Under such circumstances, there was little or no pleasure associated with learning. Rather, a determination existed to attain the degree in order to remove an obstacle seen as blocking the student's personal achievement in the work place. The degree was viewed as an arbitrary credential without any intrinsic value of its own. School-based performance was a rote kind of behavior.

> I...don't enjoy [school] because it consumes my time.... There's subjects that I do have some interest in, but it's definitely not enough interest to make it enjoyable. ...I come; I go; I make A's. That's just what you have to do whether you enjoy it or not. [Allerton]

Many shared the mandatory view and felt the work place pressure for an educated work force would only grow greater.

> I think you've got to have it today in order to advance yourself or to get anywhere, because it's going that way. I mean, the next 20 years, a four-year degree is not going to mean anything. You're going to have to have that master's degree. You might even have to take a doctorate. [Allerton]

In one sense, then, the bachelor's was not voluntary; rather, it was perceived as obligatory. On the other hand, those considering pursuit of a master's degree viewed further study as a personally satisfying pursuit.

> This time [for a master's] I'm going for what I want. If it takes a year [or] it takes two years, I'm going to wait and decide. It's something that's going to be practical, that I can use in my everyday work that'll help me, make me feel better about myself, not something for promotion. I feel job security with my [bachelor's] degree, but the next one's going to be something that I want, that I'm going to enjoy. [Allerton]

The Bachelor's Degree and Prestige in the Workplace

It was clear that participants perceived both work and student roles as publicly ranked performances. Status at work was not only linked with promotion upward through the company ranks, but also with educational level. As a worker, a person is held accountable for very specific sets of behaviors and is compared to the entire social group to which his or her job belongs. In addition, the emphasis is on achievement and production. This emphasis leads to the development of a set of prestige rankings which is often finely graded (Goode, 1960). Several participants noted work place discrimination among various types of degrees. While an associate's degree was described as better than no degree at all, it was viewed as lacking usefulness for participants given their current position within a firm or their future plans. The work setting ranking for degrees was described by a Fremont student:

> We do a lot of government work and they like people who have bachelor's degrees or master's. In fact, there's some places [that frown on you], I mean, they'll ignore you [without the bachelor's]....They would rather have the person with the bachelor's degree, even though the person with the associate's degree can do the job just as well and maybe better than the person with the bachelor's degree.

A number of participants remarked that their peer work groups were comprised of those who already had a college degree. Despite their competence and their formal position within the company, they perceived a subtle discrimination in the work setting between themselves and those with college degrees.

> Although I can do everything that some of the people above me can do, I don't have the piece of paper that says I can do it even though I can show them at work that I can. And that's universal, I think. [Charles]

> It feels good to have that prejudice out of the way or that...little tiny feeling of inferiority because everyone else [at work] will sit there and talk about that degree or that school or something like that...[The degree's] kind of like an equalizer. Then all you have left is just measured skills and abilities and you can feel comfortable with where you are. [Charles]

The status provided by a degree was a strong social factor that could not be bypassed. These adults desired social acceptance in the work group; they expected to be admitted to the ranks of degreed workers when they completed their degree.

Some who had judged the degree as a hollow credential and assessed their own knowledge as equal to that of those with degrees found that their college experience changed their opinions. One Allerton student noted, "I didn't know what [the people with engineering degrees] knew. I didn't have that knowledge." However, some found their opinions changed in a negative way. They were a bit disillusioned because their view of what a bachelor's degree represented had changed.

> I don't think a bachelor's degree says much any more now that I've finished the program . . .I'm very proud of it, but all it's done for me is tell me what I don't know. I look at all these people out there with bachelor's degrees, and...now [that] I'm qualified, I can say,..."I know the same thing you do, and we're not experts at this level." [Charles]

Some adult students noted that prestige was also linked to the degree-granting institution. This was a difficult issue for place-bound adults since most could not consider prestige a primary factor when selecting their institution. Because their adult lives were filled with important social networks and their jobs occupied such a central position, they were rarely free to pick up and move in order to attend a prestigious institution. If such an institution was available locally, other factors, such as the availability of financial assistance or of a specific major, often further restricted institutional choice.

> Personally, I would rather have a degree with "Prestige University" or something else printed on it. Allerton doesn't have a [national] reputation. That's probably one of the biggest negatives. [Allerton]

> I assumed I would go to Delta because...it's what everybody's heard of, and when you get outside...[the region, this state's] institutions are very well known. . . . And I talked to the people there and...they said, "We'll take you, but you can't complete a bachelor's degree at night....So, I started asking about private schools. [Charles]

Study participants views of the interrelationships between collegiate involvement and work were embedded in a matrix of shifting social forces. Their comments revealed that there are powerful social influences which supported the link between education and the work place. These are far more extensive and more complex than the much discussed issue of an educated work force which focuses on the adequacy of the worker's skills and the responsibility of educational institutions to deliver a marketable product. The power of a bachelor's degree for both employer and employee was evident, as was the significance of financial issues in degree pursuit and attainment. These exploratory findings clearly raised significant questions regarding the adult worker's involvement in higher education.

The time and energy required to meet employer needs for productivity and achievement placed work and work-related roles at the center of most participants' lives. They felt they had little discretionary time in relation to work. If they did not wish to jeopardize their job and risk losing its economic benefits for themselves and their families, they felt they had no choice but to respond to any and all demands made within the employment setting. It appeared that families had already accepted and made the adjustment to work-related demands on time and effort, but because of its prominence in the lives of these adults, work also dominated the allocation of resources for school. Some adults who could not reconcile excessive work demands and school chose to abandon full-time work for part-time employment. Part-time involvement gave them a great deal more control over their personal time and energy and often the needed flexibility to pursue their degree since part-time work schedules could often be adjusted based on the need for certain hours for class attendance.

The importance of work in their lives allowed the extension of its influence on many aspects of collegiate involvement. Work-related motives initiated and sustained involvement; anticipated work-related benefits influenced choice of major and type of program selection (adult degree or traditional program). Institutional choice was often based on the prestige of the institution within the work setting.

Supervisors and peers could support the adult undergraduate in meaningful ways. Their attitudes could encourage a student's efforts or disparage them. Some employment settings could also exert a considerable negative influence.

The bachelor's degree is viewed as a work force imperative and a necessity in today's employment market. As a result, it has begun to lose some of its significance for the student.

The links between employer financial support and employee undergraduate involvement are strong. The majority of participants indicated that the belief that adults have the financial resources to support their own collegiate study is false. Without additional help from employers, most participants would not be involved or would find their level of involvement drastically reduced.

THE ADULT LIFE CONTEXT AND THE STUDENT ROLE

Introduction

Most adult undergraduates have voluntarily chosen to add the student role to lives already filled with many other roles and responsibilities. In our present society, multiple role occupancy, role conflict, and role strain are seen as normal accompaniments to adult life (Fowlkes, 1987; Goode, 1960; Merton, 1957; Thoits, 1987). The addition of the student role holds the potential to increase role conflict and strain, but research is inconclusive. There are two competing views of the effects of multiple role occupancy. One position sees the strain and conflict associated with competing multiple roles as harmful to the physical and psychological well-being of adults. Roles that are viewed as "greedy for time" (Coser, 1974) are especially problematical. Thus, multiple role occupancy is viewed as inherently harmful. The second viewpoint takes the opposing stance, that multiple role occupancy allows greater personal fulfillment and is therefore potentially beneficial. Thoits (1987) has analyzed 12 major empirical studies dealing with both perspectives. She concludes that neither the "harmful effects" nor the "beneficial effects" hypotheses are sufficiently supported by the current body of research evidence (p. 15). For the majority of study participants, the addition of the student role, while creating increased demands, does not seem to lead to untenable conflict or strain. In fact, it appears that there are considerable benefits that adults perceive to be personally meaningful that serve to counterbalance the greediness of the student role in their lives.

Adult role-related literature also considers the impact of specific role combinations on adult life. In her discussion of role combination in our society, Fowlkes (1987) notes that status and gender often guide the perceptions of certain role combinations as acceptable or unacceptable. For example, until recently, parenthood and work were perceived as conflicting and incompatible roles for women despite the fact that there were often a number of positive outcomes for the family. Also, the opinion that home management tasks are "women's work" has affected men's perceptions of the value of adding such tasks to their set of family responsibilities.

While the pursuit of education is viewed positively in this country, the combination of adult life status and college student role challenges common social perceptions. The combination has different meanings at different socioeconomic levels of society. Persons held to be professionals who are prepared educationally to assume these roles, such as lawyers, doctors, or teachers, are expected to maintain a high level of performance in order to fully contribute to society. When such persons engage in continuing collegiate study or obtain more advanced degrees, this is applauded. However, even when adult involvement in formal education is valued, there is seldom precedent for combining adult life roles with undergraduate degree pursuit.

On the other hand, socioeconomic groups that view formal education as limited to one's youth and of little utility in the practical aspects of everyday life are likely to discourage involvement in higher education. Groups who believe this way fail to support collegiate involvement and members have no precedent for combining adult life roles and the college student role.

Assuming that the adult's college experience is like that of the young adult's means that adults who combine a youthful experience and adult status are anachronistic. However, there is little understanding of what the adult college student role does entail. This research study has assumed that the adult college student experience differed from that of the young adult and sought to uncover some of those differences and to make them more specific. The themes presented in this section suggest that there are differences in several areas. Adults are commonly involved in undergraduate study for much longer than four or even five years. There are also differences in the performance expectations adults hold for themselves as college students as well as differences in the perception of rewards associated with undergraduate involvement. Further, the experiences of these adult undergraduates indicate that academic relationships for the adult student differ from those of youthful students. For example, the adult undergraduate often finds him or herself in a special kind of limited peer relationship with an instructor that does not exist for the younger, traditional student. In addition the role relationships between adult undergraduates and traditional students are both peer relationships and often mentor/advisor/role model relationships.

From the personal perspective of the participants, five themes emerged related to combining the undergraduate student role with their customary adult life roles. First, duration of the degree program was a notable issue for many. The lengthy period of involvement experienced by the majority was a very real burden. Second, essentially all of the participants were high academic achievers. They commonly aimed for 'A' level grades and, indeed, felt that their social status as adults was congruent with only the highest performance levels. The pressures of everyday adult life often robbed them of study time to gain these top grades, however. Thus, they had to compromise their idealized standards. Third, despite the frustrations associated with collegiate involvement, many of these adults found a new identity as college student which they came to value highly and found a meaningful sense of self-fulfillment. In fact, one of the key factors in finding satisfaction in the adult student role was the ability to become and perform as a successful student. Fourth, participants found that in everyday adult life, models for the adult student role encouraged their own collegiate participation. The fifth theme related to prior experiences in higher education and involved the subgroup of participants who had entered college immediately after high school but had dropped out before finishing a degree. This group characterized their youthful college performance as aimless and lacking focus. They felt that collegiate involvement as an adult was a means of compensating for incomplete youthful college experiences.

The Long Process of Completing a Degree Program

The length of their degree program was a particular issue for these adults, since few could complete a degree in the traditional full-time, four-year format. Most degree seekers were looking at an extended period of involvement lasting six to eight or even ten years. This extended time period created problems for adult students who privately wondered if they had "what it takes" to complete a program under these conditions. A Charles student commented, "Sometimes I think, [it] seems like a long way and sometimes [I wonder] if I'm going to make it." Not only did participants wonder about themselves, some family members and friends also expressed doubts, placing an added weight, the burden of proof, on the adult student.

> I'm on my fourth year of attending now and [my family] have been shocked, impressed with [my] grades [and] very surprised. [But they say], "Well, you've still got a long ways to go. Are you sure you're going to do it?" Which is hard, very hard, and that's why [adults]...don't go to college is because [when]...you look 10 years ahead, that looks like a long time. It's very discouraging cause you've got a lot to put up with between [starting and finishing]. [Elmwood]

When the degree-seeking process extended over lengthy periods of time, most adults also found that the support from friends and extended family tended to diminish.

> Probably because it takes so long to complete a degree as a working adult, I imagine [my extended family] probably got tired of hearing me say, "Well, I can't do that because I have studying to do tonight."...My mother is very proud of what I'm doing but...this has taken me so long to do, I think...it just sort of goes in one ear and out the other. [Charles]

Age at degree completion was of concern to some who were worried that they might be too old to compete at their best in the employment market. They hoped the employment-related benefits of a bachelor's degree would not be lost due to their age. They feared that even with the degree, "You're never going to catch up with your contemporaries." Some also felt pressure to get started in a profession in order to have enough working years remaining to progress in the field.

> When I had the opportunity to get out of the military at the 20-year point, I took that opportunity. And one of my goals in life was to finish my degree....And I was getting on in years, so I wanted to get it done and get it over with as soon as possible so I could realize some benefits from it. [Charles]

Single parents often felt economic pressure to complete the degree as soon as possible. Part-time attendance and any other factor which postponed degree attainment was especially frustrating.

> It was going to take so much more time for me to get through this [because of developmental studies]...and it's going to be three more years before I get through....And in the meantime I get frustrated because [there are] things...my kids need. I just feel like my hands are tied. [Bayville]

The length of time required for degree completion had a significant impact on the choices participants made. Some chose a particular program or major primarily because they could earn the degree more quickly. The major reason participants cited for selecting the Allerton adult degree program was its accelerated pace.

> There is a limited selection as to what your major can be [but] I was more interested in getting my degree completed...but given the choice, I would much rather have a selection of degrees...or something else that I feel might serve me better personally.

> [The accelerated program] was the biggest [reason behind my choice of schools]. [The local university] is...a slower pace, which is good if you have that time...I didn't feel like I had that time frame to work in because I was getting older and as you get older, your options are [decreased].

Reentry students were concerned with the usefulness of their transfer credits. They wanted to avoid wasting their prior time and effort and money. They were interested in making steady progress in attaining the credits needed for the baccalaureate degree. Creating a cohesive program that moved to degree completion proved to be a daunting task for these adults when transfer credit involved multiple institutions and often several different previous majors.

Participants with transfer credits were often disappointed when they were not awarded credit toward the completion of their desired major when they reentered. When they were asked to repeat courses at their new institution, they concluded that their previous educational experiences were being judged as worthless. Some participants, determined to *avoid* this waste, made transferability of courses their chief focus. They evaluated an institution's response to course transfer as a first step toward enrollment and selected their college accordingly.

> That's part of how I got here. I...put together my [transcripts]. I called all the admissions people at all the colleges [nearby] and talked to them....I [wanted them to] tell me if it was worth pursuing...and they wouldn't do it [without a formal admissions application], so I said to heck with it....The admission and entry process here is very good....I sat in [admissions] and she walked over to the Registrar and came back and [told me what would transfer]...So, here I am. It's a compromise, but...my associate hours weren't wasted and at this stage of my life...my priority is to finish the program....I want my degree. [Charles]

When courses needed for degree completion were only offered at times that conflicted with participants' work schedules, some were forced to change majors if they wanted to finish their degree. Often, these adults began their original programs with the impression that all degree requirements could be completed evenings or weekends. One participant invested more than seven years of effort at three different universities in order to reach senior status. Unfortunately, during this time period, degree requirements had changed and courses he needed were now offered only during the workday, effectively denying him access. Another student wasted time and effort due to poor advisement. A Charles student explained his transfer from the local public university.

> It wasn't until after I had been going [to the public university] for some time... that I found out...that the original person that counseled me after I was admitted to the university... [was] wrong. I could not finish that degree unless I could go during the day [and I couldn't do that.]

Because these participants were determined to complete their undergraduate degree, they redirected their efforts, although they were faced with an unplanned extension of their period of involvement. A few also expressed frustration when they were required to take lower-division courses before admission to the major. They felt they possessed more than the expected prerequisite knowledge and were often reluctant to pay the money and take the additional time to complete the lower-division courses.

Idealized Standards

The time crunch packed a double whammy for the majority of participants because they wanted and expected to maintain high academic performance. Once committed to degree attainment, few begrudged the time spent in class or study, but a number of participants found their inability to find more time for study a real frustration. "If you really seriously study as much as you want to—to do well, then you just plain ole run out of time." Inadequate or restricted study time prevented them from achieving their desired grades.

> It's hard to find time because it depends on how [seriously] you take your studies. I'm trying to make straight A's, but with the time my work [requires] and... other things I do, it's hard to find time always to keep on top of your studying and...it makes a difference. [Elmwood]

Others recognized that the demands of adult life simply precluded the idealistic standard of all A's. But it took some effort to realign their desires with performance.

> [There are] really [only] two grades here — an A and an F in my mind. And that's one of the problems. I have had to kind of say to myself, "Well, a B is okay." I need to have a life and have B's. [Charles]

Some created a different internal standard to judge their academic efforts and to deal with the reality of not achieving what they felt they were capable of accomplishing and should accomplish.

> When I enrolled at Charles I...knew I was going here to specialize and accordingly made the rule to myself that I'm going to have straight A's in anything related to computers. There's no excuse for doing anything other than A's. This is what I'm going to do for the rest of my life....If it's not computer related, I'll accept a B, [but] generally just don't want to make any B's. [Charles]

Some students who could not carve out sufficient study time to support their desired level of performance used other strategies. A small subset felt so strongly about their academic achievement they were even willing to tolerate and accept longer periods of involvement by postponing degree attainment. "I'd like to take two [courses a semester] so I could go ahead and finish up. But I just don't feel I could do it and be able to have the grades that I want to have."

Identity as a "College Student" and its Rewards

It was clear that the majority of these adults felt overwhelmingly positive about their collegiate experience. They spoke with emphasis about the significance of learning, the vitality associated with personal growth, changed attitudes and perspectives and the satisfaction and rewards of academic achievement that was linked with a sense of personal competence. One Allerton student noted, "I would encourage anybody that's even contemplating going back to school to come back because I think it's a great experience. I think it's very broadening. . . . I feel like I enjoy the stretch of always learning something. I like that. The challenge I guess is what I'm looking for."

Positive perceptions of involvement in undergraduate study were distinct from the benefits these adults associated with degree attainment. They reported that the student role often brought them a sense of personal fulfillment. This fulfillment included enrichment and definition of personal identity and a strong sense of achievement that was specific to the academic experience. Those who were nearing the end of their programs often expressed the realization that they would continue to have learning needs throughout their lives and indicated an intent to remain involved to some extent in higher education. Many anticipated pursuing graduate degrees in the future.

A number of women spoke of discovering an identity as a student that was personally fulfilling because it affirmed them as individuals, separate from their roles of spouse and mother. They felt they were perceived as a unique and worthwhile person in the college environment by both peers and professors.

> I guess, being a homemaker, you get out of the real world in many respects....A lot of my real world was helping others...Now, I think I'm back in my own [adult] world [as a student]. It's just relating to people as yourself, rather than as someone else's support system....Just the positiveness of being treated as an individual here, rather than as somebody's wife, has been a great help toward helping me BE that individual. [Elmwood]

Other women spoke of college attendance as something they were doing "for themselves" to promote their individuality and unique identity.

> When I finally take a little time for myself [at school], [my husband and sons] have to change and realize that mom needs time to do something else besides just being mommy and wife. And, I think that [was hard] for my husband...to realize — that I'm my own person....I've got all these ideas and interests aside from family, too. And I really need that part before I lose myself as a person. [Delta]

Still other women spoke of enhancing their self-confidence as a result of involvement in undergraduate study. Part of the change was attitudinal and related to beliefs about their overall capabilities. An Allerton student commented, "It probably has changed my attitude more than anything. I don't think I had a positive attitude about things that I could do before. . . . After going through this program, you see what you can do." A Bayville student said, "It's just like this other person [inside me] that I never knew before...And I think it's this other person inside of me that's going, "Hey, you're something! You can do whatever you want to do.'" The increased self-confidence led some of these women to do things for the first time.

> Before I came back to school I wanted to be involved [with my son's baseball team], but it was...like being in the background....Now I am commissioner of his baseball league. So, that's a big difference—going from score-keeper to the commissioner. [Allerton]

A particular subset of participants found undergraduate study a special source of fulfillment. This subset included participants who indicated that they were recovering from a variety of chemical addictions. Members of this subset came from four of the six interview sites and comprised just over 5% of all participants. For this group, the student role provided an opportunity to validate abilities, to succeed and to "do more with [themselves]" than they had in the past. One participant from this subset was not only a recovering addict but also a professional counselor in the field. This person commented,

> Incidentally there is a large number of recovering people on the Delta campus....that not many people know about....a kind of a sub-culture....They're all exceptional students....And they're really...focused. And so these people have been very influential to me....it just reinforces what I'm doing....It's kind of like, "Yes you're doing the right thing."...We're all kind of striving just to be good at what we do. [Delta]

Another member of this subset was working toward the bachelor's degree in stages. Having completed the associate's degree, he was planning transfer to a four-year institution.

> [In the past] my life was significantly different because I was a heavy drinker for a number of years and a restless kind....but I've gained this [associate's] degree and to finish what I started was the huge thing for me in my life. Because I'd never done it before. It said that I've got my feet on the ground. That's what it tells me. [Elmwood]

Along with the self-fulfillment associated with learning and involvement in the college classroom, a subset of participants identified the learning environment as a sanctuary from the usual stresses of adult lives. The classroom provided a haven from other adult life roles and their associated stresses and allowed time for reflection and learning which led to self-development. Their images of the classroom contrasted the student environment with their typical adult context and responsibilities.

> I have a hard time after being with kids all day and screaming and chaos and I love all that, but it's so nice to be in a quiet, orderly environment and listen to somebody talk about something interesting. It's been a life saver for my brain. [Delta]

Another noted,

> It was a great place to come after work...to study, to be with a group of people that had the same general goal in line of bettering themselves, of learning something new, of being open-minded to things, of moving forward—that I thought was very exciting. [Charles graduate]

The classroom and academic stresses were also contrasted with usual adult life stresses. Academic pressures were viewed as self-limiting. Courses had beginnings and endings, unlike the stresses encountered in the work environment which seemed to be never ending.

> It's not that plodding to a job you hate, putting one foot in front of the other. That's the stress that's hard to deal with, because you feel — or I felt that I was unproductive, that I was beaten down....[School] is a positive stress. [Fremont]

Because the satisfactions and rewards of studenthood were highly valued, those who were anticipating completion of their degrees were often reluctant to give up these benefits. Some felt that they were so turned on to learning in the classroom setting that they anticipated some kind of ongoing involvement in higher education throughout their remaining lives.

> I think this is [true] with older students—once you open up this little gate and start learning, then you want to learn everything....Once you determine that "I can do this!" then you just want to do more and more of it and don't want to stop. [Allerton]

The most common type of anticipated involvement was pursuit of a graduate degree. "[I'll] probably [be involved] the rest of my life. I enjoy going to school. I mean, after this, I'm sure it will be maybe my master's" [Delta].

As noted previously, these adults saw the pursuit of a graduate degree as a personal choice driven by intrinsic motivation rather than externally linked pressures. Such degrees held the potential to help them achieve long-term personal life goals.

> I think [further education] will further contribute to a better lifestyle. And when I use the term lifestyle, I'm ...referring to just a happier lifestyle, one that will make me knowledgeable of what's going on in the world around me and make me aware of the issues of everyday living. [Allerton]

Over 61% of participants said they had additional plans for involvement in formal education beyond their present program. Half of those attending community college had definite plans for completing the bachelor's degree and 25% hoped to achieve a master's. Half of the participants who were involved in the adult degree programs at the private liberal arts colleges also anticipated at least a master's degree, and one had been accepted in graduate school. One-third of the adults at the public universities thought they would obtain a master's degree; one had been accepted in graduate school. Almost 7% indicated they would like to earn a doctorate.

Models for the Adult College Student Role

Some participants were fortunate to have other adult family members as role models for the adult undergraduate experience. Siblings and sisters- and brothers-in-law were able to offer practical help in learning the student role. These family members encouraged the adult student's involvement in college study and shared advice about professors, courses, and ways of thinking and studying that helped the participant assume the college student role. Spouses who had been college students themselves were able to show a student-spouse how to study effectively. Generally, college-educated wives were especially supportive of their husband's undergraduate study.

One unexpected finding was the existence and extent of familial networks of involvement. More than 8% of the sample had spouses, siblings, or parents who were involved in higher education. At five of the six study sites, study participants reported that other family members were also adult students. At the sixth site several participants reported that siblings had been adult students in the past. At Fremont University, one student reported that his entire family of origin was currently engaged in pursuing a baccalaureate or higher degree. This was especially noteworthy since his maternal grandparents had been migrant workers. At Charles College, a participant proudly reported that his 62-year-old mother had been involved for years in college course work and expected to share graduation with her son. At Bayville Community College, another student reported that both he and his wife were seeking bachelor's degrees. In a number of families, these collegiate educational networks also included young adult children.

Adult students also found models among work colleagues who were undergraduates, among other adults who shared the classroom with them, and among friends and acquaintances. One participant spoke of the admiration and respect he had for a member of his church who had successfully completed her doctorate. He mentioned that watching her struggles and ultimate success had been instrumental in encouraging him to pursue his bachelor's degree and in keeping him motivated.

Once participants felt confident in the undergraduate student role and experienced success, participants sometimes turned the tables and became role models themselves.

> I encouraged [one of the men in the same work group] to come to Allerton. He was...looking at the same [occupationally risky] future I am....So, I encouraged him to come over and finish [his] degree here. [Allerton]
>
> Two of the people that have worked in my group — they're now coming to Charles. I brought them over and signed them up just like [my supervisor] did for me....And then I've encouraged another one of my peers; she's going to another college, but I've also gotten her to start. [Charles]

Adult classmates often modeled the intricacies and tricks of the student role for newcomers and reentry students who had had a lengthy stopout period between episodes of involvement. Experienced adult students suggested specific courses and shared books and other learning resources with their adult peers. They gave advice on negotiating registration and suggested ways of dealing with difficult professors. Without youthful college experiences, adult first-time college students tended to rely on peer models. Typically, these individuals had been unable to attend college as young adults for financial reasons or because there were no family expectations for college attendance. During their earlier adult years, *they had been* less likely to associate with others who had degrees and had often lacked collegiate role models.

Youthful Aimlessness

Compensation

Past experiences in higher education and a subsequent exit prior to degree completion affected current performance in a number of ways. Participants spoke of a need to compensate for what was now perceived as a past failure. Such failure was often associated with different attitudes these adults held as youths. There was a strong subtheme of *youthful aimlessness* within this group.

Many study participants who attended college soon after high school graduation spoke of having no clear direction or goal. These adults believed that they had gone to college because it was the "expected thing to do." The social structures of their youthful lives and the expectations of parents and friends seemed to encourage this. For some, the threat of military service in the Vietnam war also affected their decision.

> It was a very confusing time for me personally. And, of course, I was also concerned about the fact that...the Vietnam war was going on and, as an 18-year-old, I didn't know where I was headed in that direction as well. The lottery draft was coming up at the end of that year and I didn't know whether or not I was going to be called up for military service. [Elmwood]

Participants who went to college because it was expected spoke of having no particular personal desire to attend and indicated that they had no personal goals that required college attendance for fulfillment. Thus college attendance occurred by default and external pressure, rather than as a consequence of an active, internal desire for involvement. One adult commented,

> I decided I would go to college, but I really wasn't motivated. I just wasn't sure which direction I was going. I did go to college for one year, but I didn't apply myself; didn't study; didn't try...and by the time that first semester was over I had three D's and three F's. [Bayville]

Some participants spoke not only of aimlessness, but also of a sense of alienation in the college setting. Those that had attended large public universities most often described such a sense.

> So I attended [a public university] somewhat unwillingly, only because I had the scholarship. I think being [there] overwhelmed me because I had come from a private girls' school and I wasn't ready for a black coalition and the march against Vietnam, recruiting for communism and a lot of other things....Although I half-heartedly went into [it], I was totally turned off by the campus environment. [Allerton]

Another man, who had also attended a large public university, felt alienated by the special treatment given campus athletes, the anonymity of large classes, and the lack of contact with professors in classes taught by graduate students. He also felt that the first two years were designed to "...force out the people that [weren't] going to make it. I was one of them. I just went right out" [Allerton].

While many described negative factors associated with prior college attendance, many balanced this with positive elements, including rewarding social relationships with both peers and faculty and the opportunity to acquire skills and abilities needed to function on one's own in an adult world.

The subtheme of aimlessness that participants frequently attached to their young adult college experiences was often contrasted with their current attitudes. As adult undergraduates, participants expressed the belief that they were "different now." They spoke of being internally motivated and of having personal desires and overall life goals that could be met through participation in higher education. The comments of the Bayville student quoted above illustrate the difference.

> After I was the [food service] manager, I...took some continuing education programs....It wasn't anything that was required. After I had been in that [new] position, I decided to just take a quarter of accounting to help me in my job because I had to work with the CPA's....Then [a local college] started a program at night and...I've been doing this for four or five years and I plan to graduate. ...I have a goal now. I'm 50 years old and I don't know that I will use this degree for anything other than self-satisfaction, but that in itself will be enough.

Some of those with prior experience in higher education who had failed to earn a degree or credential had failed academically. Since these adults had been poorly motivated when they went to college, they seemed to feel that poor grades were a direct *outcome* of lack of effort due to poor motivation. But they also indicated that academic failure further decreased their motivation.

Adults indicated compensation was needed in three areas. First, they felt a need to demonstrate academic ability to counteract their youthful aimlessness when such aimlessness had led to poor academic performance. This subgroup often had views similar to the Allerton student who noted, "I wanted to try to recover my past failures. And that was...the focus I had....My self-confidence was terribly gone after [my post-high school college experience], my confidence in my ability to learn and all."

Second, they were dismayed over their failure to finish their degree as youths. They sought their degree as adults to provide a sense of closure. These completion oriented adults often spoke of a long-term monitoring of their life circumstances that involved watching for the right combination of situation and resources that would allow them to return to school. Some had tried to complete a degree several times in the past, only to find that they still weren't ready to invest the effort in school given their life circumstances at the time. They spoke of an internal sense of readiness as an essential ingredient in degree pursuit. Such readiness appeared to require the interaction of reasonably supportive life circumstances and an internal commitment and motivation sufficient to outweigh the obstacles. Supportive life circumstances included the obvious major factors of financial resources for school expenses and a belief that schedules could be adapted to include class attendance and study time. Internal motivation included (a) a readiness to make the hard day-to-day decisions to substitute study for other activities, (b) decisions to re-enroll at the end of each semester and (c) a continual focus on the degree as a goal.

The adults who were seeking to compensate for prior poor academic performance were often left with emotional fallout. Without a background of academic success, they feared that subsequent performances would also result in failure. This was expressed by one who had tried college after high school and again a few years later, only to drop out for the second time.

> I was very scared because of what I had previously experienced. I was not intimidated at all by the younger professors. It never ever bothered me. The [younger] students never ever bothered me. That was not my thing. It was just the past failure. Here I was...[making] that third attempt. Well, I did better and better [each semester]. [Fremont]

Prior poor performance also influenced participants' evaluation of their ability to compete academically in baccalaureate institutions they perceived to be highly competitive. In such instances, their prior performance influenced their choice of the type of institution to reenter. Most often, a community college site was chosen. They used their performance at the community college as a test of their academic prowess. This success increased their confidence in their ability.

Those who spoke of wanting to complete something they had started felt, "It's always bugged me that I never finished that. So, now, 12 years later that's what I'm trying to do" [Delta].

Third, there was a small subset of those with prior college experience and past academic difficulties who were compensating for a poor secondary background where they had not learned the skills necessary to perform successfully as college students. These adults were frequently still struggling with this deficit and were currently having trouble learning successful student behaviors. "I had no skills whatsoever that prepared me for college. I didn't know how to study. I didn't have the background [knowledge] that I needed." [Fremont]

From the context of everyday adult life roles, inclusion of the college student role entails multiple conflicts. However, it is apparent that there were considerable personal rewards for adults in the academic setting. Their high level of achievement reflected their commitment and served as a source of personal satisfaction that compensated for youthful academic failure to some degree. The perceptions of these participants is congruent with a view of multiple role occupancy as beneficial in the lives of adults.

Participants rarely desired to extend their period of degree pursuit for many years. However, the circumstances of adult life often precluded finishing in a time frame similar to the traditional four-year one. Those who were involved on a part-time basis indicated a preference for full-time participation. They felt this pattern would reduce some of the problems associated with an extended period of degree pursuit. Problems included the constant risk of interruption, extensive outlay of time and money, shifting degree requirements over time, extended family sacrifices, and personal doubts about the ability to persevere.

Adult social status and life experiences led to views of adult performance as high-level performance. This view transferred to the academic setting and served as a template for adult achievement. Students whose other life roles reduced the amount of time available to spend in study and learning were frustrated by their inability to maintain the standard of performance they expected.

The rewards of collegiate involvement were highly satisfying to adults. They prized the learning process itself and the associated intellectual stimulation. Meeting academic standards enhanced their self-esteem and extended their skills and abilities. The college classroom provided opportunities to explore themselves and to reflect on their beliefs and meanings. Similar opportunities were unavailable elsewhere in their lives. Some concluded that the rewards were often sufficient to compensate for the sacrifices and difficulties involved.

Models for adult college student behavior were more readily available for some adults than for others. Those from middle class backgrounds were more likely to have known other adults who were pursuing a degree. Models outside the college environment provided inspiration and encouragement for initiating study as well as emotional support for continued involvement. Peer models within the college setting provided insider information and practical help in accomplishing necessary tasks.

Prior youthful collegiate experiences supported continued involvement as an adult most often by providing a negative contrast with current adult expectations and desires. Participants viewed youthful experiences as situations to overcome through successful achievement and degree attainment as an adult.

THE ADULT UNDERGRADUATE AS COMMUNITY MEMBER

Introduction

Community-related activities and roles seldom have the performance indicators that work and school have, nor are they basic roles fundamental to society like that of spouse and parent. Rather, they are a means of connecting the adult to the larger society. Community participation patterns vary markedly according to age, occupational status, and gender (Knox, 1977). Forms of social participation include involvement in organizations and voluntary associations, religious activities, recreational activities, political participation, and attendance at public events and informal activities with family and friends. Adults are involved in their communities in the roles of organization member, church member, and citizen (Knox, 1977).

Expanding work hours have had an impact on leisure time and community involvement. Schor (1992) indicates that leisure time has dropped by 47 hours a year over the past two decades. A recent Scripps Howard News Service/Ohio

University poll also indicates that Americans have less time to devote to community activities, and notes that overall volunteerism in America is declining. The poll indicates that one factor that may be contributing to declining community involvement is the lack of a sense of belonging in a community. Adults who lived in a neighborhood two years or less were unlikely to have participated in community organizations or agencies (Hargrove & Stempel, 1993).

Participants were involved in the community outside of their family and work roles first of all as individuals. At this level they related to other adults as friends and acquaintances. These social relationships were often severely restricted for adults who had added the student role to their lives. However, for single adults and single parents, friendships were particularly significant since friends and acquaintances often provided the support unavailable through family members. Many participants' involvement in organizations was also restricted, though a few had been involved extensively in Scouting or volunteer service agencies through leadership roles in the past. The most frequently maintained area of community involvement was within the local church. No participants indicated involvement in civic affairs.

Knox (1977) states that community roles "intersect with family, educational, and occupational life cycle activities even more than these three other clusters intersect" (p. 216). Many women and some men described community interests which were an extension of family roles. These family role-related interests were based on their children's interests. Such activities included coaching sports teams and involvement in their children's schools as a volunteer or parent-teacher-student organization member. A few participants described involvement in community service organizations through employer outreach programs but indicated that their time investment was minimal. A few adult students had a desire to be involved in their collegiate communities outside of the classroom. In contrast with Knox (1977), participants saw clear connections between their educational involvement and work and between educational involvement and family, as described earlier in this chapter. They described limited connections between family and community and occupation and community.

As the study sought to understand participants' community responsibilities in connection with organizational memberships, associations with social groups, leisure activities, and friendships, three themes emerged. First, it was evident that adult undergraduates' involvement in their communities was very limited. Second, only the African American subgroup openly expressed a concern for their immediate community and a desire to share their educational benefits with that community. Third, these adults expressed their community involvement primarily through friendship connections. Such connections connected them with the larger community at a personal level. Those with restricted family support systems utilized these interpersonal, community-based friendship connections to augment family relationships. Such actions were a result of limited family resources and were most often associated with single adults, single parents, and the few that lacked significant spousal support. In such situations, community-based friends thus served as surrogate partners.

Minimal Community Involvement

Across the entire study sample, there was a very restricted pattern of involvement in the community. One key element in all community activities is that of discretionary time. It became apparent early in the study that few of these adults had discretionary time available once they assumed the student role. However, the majority reported that they had little discretionary time to take part in community activities before they became students. College involvement only exacerbated the general trend that had characterized the lives of these adults. Participants severely restricted community activity thus seemed to reflect the national trend. Their lack of participation might also be linked to their mobility, since a majority indicated that relocating was a common experience.

The most common community activity described by participants was church involvement and a few indicated that their student role had encroached even here.

> I did cut down on church because I found out this. I found that Sunday mornings was the only time that I had free....the kind of business that I'm in...a lot of people will come by on Saturdays and...I want them to go home because I need to [study, but they don't leave.]...So, Sunday was a real good time for me to try to study. [Allerton]

Sharing Educational Benefits

Despite the overall lack of community participation among participants, a small subset described a sense of personal responsibility that led to contributions in the communities where they lived and in some cases to the academic community.

The subset of African American participants was unique in its predominant belief in working with their community. They expressed a sense of personal responsibility for sharing the benefits of their education with their community at large. They believed in giving back to the community by encouraging others to seek higher education. One participant who was experiencing social rejection at church as a result of degree pursuit nevertheless felt a sense of personal responsibility that outweighed individual discomfort.

> A lot of [negative response] is coming from the people [at] church. I don't want to leave that particular church because of the behavior of the people, if I can be an inspiration to somebody else there, if I remain. [Elmwood]

Another African American man said,

> To me the most positive thing about being here at Charles and a college student is the...privilege of having the opportunity to come to college at my age and finish a degree and still have opportunity, I think, available to me for applying skills...I'm going to help somebody — Probably more than one. And that's what it's all about, being able to have the resources...to help other people recognize their talents and develop them. [Charles]

An African American women spoke of casting about for a major and deciding that a major in education would be of both personal and community benefit.

> I sort of was just in limbo for a while. And then I started to get involved with my children's education...And I realized then that that was something that I wanted to do—majoring in education. I want to do something to help our children; when I say "our" I mean my race of children, the minorities. Because to me teachers don't really care about them....In order to change anything in the system, you have to get in there. So, that's my goal....I want to give something back to the community and I can do it that way.

A second small subset of participants was involved in extracurricular campus activities. Those who choose to be involved did so because of a desire to participate fully in all available aspects of the college experience or because they felt a responsibility to function as adults in this setting. Because adults are responsible participants in their other life roles, being involved in the larger college community outside the classroom was seen as an appropriate behavior for an adult.

> I was very involved with the student-government association....In my opinion I think that's pretty typical across the United States...administrators see the [adult] students as only wanting to come here and take class. They're [seen as having no interest] in really developing a bond or some sort of affiliation with the school. They want to come here and they want to meet their own needs and that's that. And that's something that we have been trying to change and just to create an awareness amongst the administrators...that we're here...We'd like some attention....I think there could be a greater bond, a greater affiliation created [between the school and adult students]. [Charles]

Several of the participants who attended the community colleges were members of the national community college honor society. The key reason for valuing their involvement with this campus organization was its emphasis on community service.

Friends as Surrogate Partners

The primary link with the community for the majority of participants was through their friend role. This role was especially important to participants with restricted family roles (without spouse or children or lacking both). When family members were unavailable to form partnerships with adult students, friends met a critical need for this subset. Friends supported the involvement of these adults in higher education by supporting them in a variety of ways, but especially in the maintenance of motivation and morale.

Several different kinds of friends were involved in supporting the study participants. These included long-time friends, fellow students, persons who were both fellow students and friends and acquaintances.

Long-time friends who had been college students themselves shared similar views of the values of education. "They know the value and they know what I'm going through. So, it's easy for them to say positive things about college and ask me questions and praise [me for accomplishments]" [Charles]. This positive quote illustrates three components of friends' support that adult undergraduates found helpful: portraying college in a positive light, praising accomplishments, and communicating active interest. Other key components mentioned by participants were encouragement, respect, and admiration. Acquaintances were also able to provide these types of support.

A number made comments similar to one who said, "You would be amazed how many times you hear, 'I wish I had the opportunity to do what you are doing now.'" Such statements from both friends and acquaintances seemed to generate support by contrasting the adult students' current efforts with a life that did not include school and thus reminding the students of their motives and goals.

Friends and acquaintances who had been to college shared a common experience with the adult student that generated a special level of understanding. These adults felt that such persons could identify closely with what they were experiencing. In addition, such persons could serve as a stimulus for achievement. "The people that I most associate with [are] people who have already achieved what I'm hoping to achieve and they have generally been supportive" [Elmwood].

Friends supplied financial assistance and mentored the adult undergraduate. One type of support offered by friends and fellow students was unique. This was a particular type of emotional support that involved the sharing of feelings. One adult noted that "talking to people [at school] and telling them how you feel about a particular class or how you're doing in it or discussing problems...is all very therapeutic" [Delta]. The type of social interaction available on campus led to the sharing of ideas as well as of feelings. This was enjoyable for many and often stimulated personal growth. Such growth was cited as one of the important benefits of collegiate involvement.

> "Friends are a method of making you more well rounded. [Interacting] gives you greater insight [in]to someone else's goals and beliefs and feelings towards something...gets you out of that tunnel vision of your own viewpoint." [Elmwood]

The pleasure of associating with like-minded friends who were excited about learning supported continued involvement for many of the study participants.

Finally, friends played a key role when they expressed belief in a participant's potential and ability to be a college student even when the student had doubts. Friends and acquaintances also made a valuable contribution when they prodded the student. "Things were getting so difficult [at school], I thought, 'Do I really want to hang in there?'...My [long-time swimming] instructor...[was] the one that's really behind me and pushed me and that helped me" [Bayville].

Fellow students at Allerton played a special role due to the unique nature of the accelerated program and the social groups created within the student ranks. These groups included cohorts of adults who entered the program at the same time and remained together until completing the program, and study groups that were subgroups created from within cohorts. These groups supported the development of close student relationships that sometimes grew into personal friendships as well. Allerton students commented on the unique closeness of the study groups and on the supportive power inherent in the relationships that developed in this group.

One noted,

> Our study group has been together since day one and by associating with a certain group for better than a year on a weekly basis, you get pretty friendly. [It's] probably a friendlier group than any group that I've met in my [former] college or work career. It's not a next-door-neighbor type friendly, but it's [an] association that'll probably be around for a long time. [Allerton]

Study groups and class members were particularly adept at supporting one another at times of crisis. The study groups particularly fostered interdependence among group members and were important in facilitating the learning of the members. Thus, support was goal-oriented. The intensity of the program's pace also meant a unique type of higher education experience. Sharing that experience provided support for group members.

> The first two classes we had, there were a lot of people unsure about how this [program] was going to be and [some] wanted to drop out. They didn't feel they could do it. There was a lot of support there for them. [Allerton]

Another Allerton student commented,

> I felt like I was with a group of acquaintances that could be friends. We had many things in common [including] families [and] plans for career changes, and we were all in school....I don't think a large [public university] would [give you] that fellowship and that support. You feel, "I'm not in this by myself. If they can do it, I can do it." It's like being in class with friends rather than being a number in a class of 50.

The most important aspect of this role was the contribution of friends in instances when a student lacked family support. Members of the African American subgroup, however, exhibited a special sense of responsibility to their community.

Participants were least affected by their organizational and civic involvement in the community. The African American subset of participants conceived of their community at large as an integral part of their lives and saw themselves as responsible to that community. Part of their beliefs about responsible community membership involved establishing specific links between their involvement in higher education and their local communities in order to advance those in that community. Friendship provided the major connections between their other adult life roles and the community. Friends were highly significant for two subsets of participants, single adults and single parents. For these two groups, friends provided critical support needed for initiation and continuance of their collegiate involvement.

CONCLUSION

Study participants' narratives reveal multiple connections between various adult life roles and the undergraduate student role. Studenthood was far more than a peripheral factor in an adult's life. The total adult life context serves as a basis for the expression of the adult's student role.

The interaction between family and student roles involved the greatest complexity compared with other adult roles examined in the study. Participants described far-reaching changes among most family roles. The importance of social, practical, and emotional support for collegiate involvement was also most evident from the perspective of the family. The family clearly provided the greatest level and diversity of support which was a critical component undergirding every aspect of the adult's participation.

Work role themes revealed a pattern of extensive relationships between degree pursuit and educational values within the setting of the work place. Employer financial support for employee involvement in undergraduate study was a pivotal factor for the majority of participants. In addition, however, the work place often offered a significant and pivotal context for an adult's collegiate involvement and often influenced many of the student's decisions related to the specifics of involvement.

Past study of the effects of college on traditionally aged students suggests many positive affects (Astin, 1993). The experience of collegiate involvement revealed by adult participants in this research also implies that the impact of collegiate involvement on adults may be equally as strong. The findings also indicate a set of unique considerations related to the adult undergraduate. These include the lengthy time often required for completion of a degree program, the impact of prior youthful college experiences, the need for modelling of the adult college student role, and the nature of an identity as "adult college student," especially when the common social definition of college student excludes an adult.

The adult college student's involvement in the community appears to be expressed most fully through their friendship roles. Civic and organizational participation is low for this group of adults, a finding in agreement with nationally described trends.

The themes discussed in this chapter have been summarized in the following table. For the reader's convenience, the order of listing in the table agrees with the placement of each discussion within the chapter.

TABLE 4
Categories and Themes of Life Role by Adult Undergraduates

Family Role	Work Role	Student Role	Community Role
Balancing adult life roles is an elusive goal. Family support for collegiate involvement is a sacrificial act. Degree pursuit is a partnership. Children are the long-term beneficiaries of collegiate involvement.	Work is #1. A "student friendly" work place can provide important support. The degree is a work force imperative. The degree is linked to prestige in the work place.	Lengthy time spent in degree pursuit is a burden. Compromise of idealized standards is often needed. Finding the self in a "college student" identity is rewarding. Models for the adult student role provide encouragement. Youthful aimlessness contrasts with adult student commitment and purpose. Adult involvement can compensate for some aspects of one's educational past.	Minor levels of involvement were reported both prior to collegiate involvement and after. Educational benefits are for sharing. Friends can be surrogate partners.

Chapter 6

Summary and Implications

OVERVIEW OF STUDY DESIGN

Adult undergraduate students, individuals 25 years of age and older, represent almost half of the current undergraduate population; they are approximately 44% of the current enrollment in American undergraduate higher education. Although often described and judged from young undergraduate research and assumptions, adult students represent many distinctive differences. They come with seasoned life experiences, learned wisdom of themselves and their world, and with many adult-related responsibilities. They usually come with a different set of motivations and beliefs about the importance of a college education and specialized academic knowledge acquisition. These adults come to college recognizing that they enter with a disadvantage related to their adult age, a lapse in time from previous schooling, and with conflicting time and resource commitments. Yet they do come and consistently report higher levels of satisfaction with faculty and higher levels of valuing the collegiate experiences in comparison to their younger adult colleagues (Kasworm & Pike, in press).

How do these adults experience an undergraduate education? This current research study was crafted to examine a select landscape of adult undergraduate students.

Three major research questions guided the study:

- **How do adults describe their learning engagement in the classroom and its relationship to their broader life involvements?**
- **How do adults describe their perceptions of involvement in a public community college, public university, or private liberal arts adult degree program environment?**
- **What common patterns and themes of involvement reflect the adult undergraduate experience in relation to the context of their family, work, and community roles and responsibilities?**

This inquiry gathered case study interviews, highly rich narratives of the adults' own sense of meaning and actions as learners, as undergraduate students, and as adults who incorporated into their lives work, family, and potential community role involvements. Ninety adult undergraduates were interviewed across six institutional sites. These sites represented two community colleges, two public universities, and two adult degree programs in liberal arts colleges. Each adult typically participated in a two-hour, audio-taped interview on their respective campus.

Diverse adults from many walks of life, from many points in the academic process, and from a variety of educational institutions spoke to their perspectives and beliefs as students. These adults shared their experiences of concurrently engaging in undergraduate studies while also actively pursuing adult lives of work, family, and community world citizen. One of the important contributions of this naturalistic inquiry was to purposefully examine this phenomenon from the place and perspective of the adult student. Through this inquiry process, the actors (in this case, adult undergraduate students) shared their defining beliefs, actions, and meanings. These beliefs of self, place, and learning actions framed the adult students' reality in the classroom, in the collegiate experience, and in their lives. Thus, this research process focused upon the place of the individual voice and the context of adult, student, and college.

Inductive analysis of these adult student statements generated levels of inference, of themes, and of meaning structures. Analysis of data was grounded in inductive thematizing and categorizing, both within each case, across cases at each site, and across categories of institutions. Common core themes have been identified for adult undergraduates across settings, within settings, and within particular academic status definers (lower- or upper-division standing, or enrollment in a specialized program). In addition, because the study gathered richly diverse cases of adult students in a variety of institutional contexts, numerous subthemes reflecting subgroupings of adult students and particularly contextual circumstances were also identified.

Because of the wealth of data and the highly diverse groupings of adults, we are reporting select major findings in this chapter, along with implications for research and practice. We urge our readers to examine each of the chapters and case studies of the six institutions located in the appendices for more in-depth understanding of the diversity of beliefs, actions, and contexts.

ADULT AS STUDENT LEARNER

Adult beliefs about the college student role, their experience of classroom relationships and expectations, as well as the negotiated meanings about self as adult learner, were the substance of action. These beliefs, meanings, and actions deeply influenced adult students' judgements of themselves and others, as well as their judgements of learning in both the collegiate and other adult life environments. For them, learning in the collegiate environment was both directed by faculty and socially constructed and acted upon by themselves. Key overview findings for this section will be discussed in sections of 1) the entry and socialization process and 2) beliefs and actions related to learning in the classroom and in adult life roles. A discussion of implications for research and practice follows.

Entry and Socialization Process

Adults entered or reentered the student learner role with specific beliefs that influenced their actions in the collegiate setting. They acted from both private belief spheres of self-knowledge and from public spheres of socially constructed knowledge about student role, collegiate setting, and societal judgement. Their past experiences with collegiate involvement and their current participation in a particular college environment appeared to frame the construction of socially negotiated beliefs about the nature of collegiate learning. Their unique life biography and current life experiences, including successful and unsuccessful life involvements in marriage, family, and work, also shaped their beliefs and actions as they entered and became socialized into the student role.

From this study, it was evident that past backgrounds of adult students accentuated their adaptation or lack of adjustment in the collegiate environment. First-time entry adults strongly desired to become members of the academic community and to prove to others, as well as themselves, that they could be successful as students. Many looked to outward signs of this acceptance through first contacts and first classes. Outcomes of tests and course grades took on significant importance for these individuals in their determination to becoming acceptable. As part of this proving game, many specifically acted on a strategy of establishing limited, incremental goals. These new entry adults, and sometimes reentry adults who had a long break in enrollment, defined and acted on manageable goals with clear outcomes—such as a first test, essay paper completion, or a first academically challenging course completion. They also did not necessarily plan for a four-year degree program journey; rather they looked to each step or goal along this path as their immediate challenge. These adults entered with anxiety about fitting in and being accepted, as well as only believing that they should accept a reasonable commitment of college involvement from course to course, or semester to semester. These commitments were viewed as actions which could be under their control and be completed. To not complete the commitment or to not do well in the commitment was to fail the judgements of the collegiate institution, themselves, and perhaps others (family, spouse, or parents).

Most adults in the study were reentry students who focused upon adaptation to a different academic environment. In these situations, they were more confident about themselves as students, yet also were very observant to act and produce in acceptable ways for the particular classroom culture. They were also in a judging posture—both conducting comparative assessments between themselves and others, as well as between current and past institutions. Across the spectrum of adult students, there was variability in frames of judgements, beliefs of life efficacy, and learner actions. There were differences between new entry; reentry adults with a significant gap in their previous enrollment; reentry students who transferred to a more competitive four-year environment; and reentry adults who transferred to a similar collegiate climate. Yet different in their adaptation were adults who participated in a uniquely structured adult degree program at Allerton

College. They reported differing reentry beliefs shaped by the particular context of a customized and accelerated degree program.

In these entry and reentry actions, it was evident that the particular place, status, and context of the adult student did relate to their unique beliefs and perspectives of themselves and their student involvement. In these actions to either becoming an accepted member of the academic community or adapting to a new collegiate environment, these adults noted several supports for entry or reentry. Most viewed faculty, select staff, and themselves as aiding in the entry process. Although some students pointed also to specific institutional supports, most saw the key support coming from faculty and significant others in their lives. They did acknowledge the importance of special admissions policies, special scheduling or academic formats for adults, as well as special academic programs. However, they believed that primary support was focused upon the personal interactions—of faculty, select staff, and significant others in this journey.

Socialization for adults focused upon three areas: stairstepping from prior experiences to current student role, resolving uneven knowledge and skills, and learning how to learn and study. Socialization was influenced in four varied ways by prior experience. One group had strong beliefs in self and their prior self success experiences to bring about future student success, while a second group focused upon expertise in other adult life roles as supporting success in current student roles. A third group of reentry students drew upon success experiences in recent past collegiate involvements, while a final group drew upon their beliefs of work ethic and its significance for their success. These four action beliefs influenced how most adult students projected future success linked to their life biographies and actions in their new adult student roles. As part of the socialization process, new entry and reentry adults often faced concerns with uneven knowledge and skill background for current demands and expectations of college work. Community college adults predominantly valued developmental studies programs, while those adults in four-year schools noted a variety of other strategies to develop needed background to meet current course demands. Lastly, adult suggested a variety of strategies in their learning-how-to-learn activities as part of the socialization process. These four key strategies were expressed by different adult groupings and included: creating activities and organizers which would maximize the retention of content knowledge, perceiving learning through faculty organization and direction in the course, believing application of classroom knowledge related directly to their own world of actions, and lastly, valuing the application of knowledge in the world but moving beyond concrete application to focus upon deeply embedded conceptual meanings.

There were a number of key influences related to entering and participating in the student role. Many adult students who were first-time entrants spoke to the paradox of being an older student, of not fitting youth-oriented or societal expectations for college attendance. During the first semester of involvement, most of these adults found an acceptance and the absence of assumed judgement of their actions as adults in a young-adult environment. They spoke to establishing a self-defined comfort zone in the classroom both through self actions and related faculty and other student actions. A few reported disguising themselves as younger students as another way to socialize into the collegiate culture. Both first-time entry and reentry students spoke to the impact of stress and conflict of adult life on the student role and the varied ways they coped with those difficulties. In addition, many students believed that they experienced both positive and negative age-related influences on their learning. Those who had been first-time entrants or reentrants with a significant gap in enrollment more often felt an age-related deterioration in their memories and recall capabilities for learning; while those who were recent reentry and continuing students felt that aging had positive impacts upon their learning to create more meaningful understandings between themselves and the academic content.

In this initial entry and socialization process, adult students observed the differential influence of instructional and learning strategies between select academic disciplines. These disciplinary differences most often raised issues with the nature of observed instruction in sciences, mathematics, and engineering. These adults perceived faculty detachment and disinterest in aiding students to connect with learning in these hard sciences. Some students also believed that adults were less able to engage in learning sciences and mathematics because of age-related difficulties, while other adults suggested that the difficulties were related to lack of current background knowledge which supported the development of current science and mathematics learning.

Because they were embedded in the world beyond college, these adults also engaged in learning, thinking and acting on knowledge connected to their other life roles. These students voiced a variety of relationships and value positions in understanding their adult life world of real, lived, and practical knowledge, in relation to their student life world focused on academic knowledge. Adult students suggested five varied perspectives about perceived influences of real world knowledge as they engaged in student learning-how-to-learn in academic knowledge. One group believed that they had to endure lower-division courses as necessary and foundational academic knowledge, to participate in future relevant, helpful, and practical knowledge in upper-division courses. These students focused upon memorization and recall, assuming that later academic knowledge would be more relevant and meaningful learning. A second subgroup considered learning as a reinforcement, a further illumination of their past knowledge, or an authentication of their background expertise. These individuals continued to hold this belief of real world knowledge as the dominant and valued form of knowledge in their lives. The third subgroup was suggested by students who entered classes with a critical and judgmental evaluation of academic content. They elected to learn academic content when it was relevant, applicable, and had utility to real world actions. This group moved beyond screening out academic knowledge based upon past real world knowledge, but they still did judge the appropriateness and relevance of new academic knowledge for their lives. The fourth group valued both academic and real world knowledge, but they came at academic knowledge from its embeddedness of real world knowing. Thus, they gained further understanding in their real world actions from the frame of knowledge, theory, and constructs of academic knowledge. The final subgroup represented adult students who desired to become part of this academic world and viewed their full immersion in the academic knowledge base as an important part of that effort. They attempted to make active bridges of understanding and meaning between academic and real world knowledge.

Beliefs about Learning in the Classroom and Adult Life

The center stage for these adult students was the classroom; the broader university culture held only peripheral interest. The direct involvement in the classroom became the setting for creating and negotiating meanings, for learning, for being students, and for defining the collegiate experience. As these adult students spoke to their lives as students and their perceptions of faculty, students, and classrooms, there were clear socially constituted terms and definers that represented socialized academic beliefs. Not unlike younger students, they reported a concern for quality teaching, quality classroom experiences, and quality instructors. They valued a well-designed course, knowledgeable and committed instructors, supportive classroom relationships, and a class size which provided personal interactions with faculty. In addition, students in the one customized adult degree program valued an efficient and compressed course instructional format and outcomes.

In addition to these valued qualities of faculty and course instruction, these adults also reported a second higher standard for valued instructors and classrooms. This higher standard reflected faculty enthusiasm, motivating active learning interactions, skillful instruction, collegiality, and a respect and helpfulness to adult students. They believed effective learning came through active class involvement, a supportive community-based classroom environment, and meaningful in-class faculty-connected relationship. Beyond the more socially identified boundaries of the classroom, these adult students further suggested that they came to the classroom as both an "observer" and participant. They suggested that they initially came into the classroom as "foreigners" with a set of experiences and beliefs different from the younger college student culture. With the passing of time, they conformed and acted in socialized collegiate ways appropriate to a college student in the classroom. Yet, they also saw themselves as apart from the younger college population, and somewhat also apart from other adult college students. They viewed themselves as most effective learners in a transactional, dialogic classroom experience, yet they also reported internally monitoring of their speech and behaviors to not dominant the class and support involvement by more passive younger students.

For these adult students, their sense of worth and meaning was strongly embedded within the judgements and actions of the faculty instructor. They suggested four differing types of relationships with faculty representing beliefs of god-like qualities of a faculty member; of faculty as accessible experts; of faculty in a quasi-peer relationship with adult students; and of a true partnership between equals of faculty and adult students. They also noted their belief that the better faculty valued adult students and their work/life experiences and held higher expectations for adults in comparison to younger college students. Through their understanding of adult life, better faculty made allowances for the conflicts that caused occasional adult inability to attend class or turn in a paper at a deadline.

Adult students had specific beliefs about the classroom environment. They believed in active involvement, as defined through committed attentive presence in the classroom and an active cognitive interaction with course ideas. For many, it meant active involvement in discussions; for others it meant purposeful listening with only select verbal comments of discussion. Most adults valued faculty who purposefully created class participation and used a variety of teaching/learning strategies. They valued a supportive class environment which included a self-defined comfort zone, a sense of community, and a support for their rituals and routines which supported their learning. In their own way, many lower-division adults, and some upper-division adults, valued the structure and predictability of the college classroom. This predictability was part of their beliefs of specific rituals and routines which supported their success as student learners, as well as balancing many different expectations within their multiple role demands. Upper-level students were more open and flexible to alternative formats and instructional strategies and used fewer rituals and routines in their pursuits of learning.

Most adults valued faculty relationships which were created in the classroom and represented a connectedness between faculty and adult students. This connected relationship was created through recognized adult student respect towards faculty, adult student commitment to academic work, and through faculty helpfulness towards adult students. There was also one group of adult students in a public university who did not believe that they could gain a connected relationship with the faculty in the classroom and believed they had to create an out-of-class relationship with faculty to become known as committed learners and to be understood and respected as adult students.

Differences between beliefs and experiences of age-integrated and age-segregated classrooms were evident in these adult students. Those who experienced age-integrated learning valued younger adults and their contributions. However, they also noted a concern for a subset of younger students who were uncommitted, disrespectful, and unfocused on college goals. Within the age-integrated environments, adults believed that adult students were more competitive and achievement-oriented in relation to younger students. On the whole, these adults valued the variety of ages, viewpoints, and experiences in an age-integrated learning experience. On the other hand, adults in the age-segregated classrooms questioned the contributions of young students who lacked relevant experiences and perspectives for their current adult lives. In age-segregated environments, adults valued the all-adult classroom experience, particularly noted the contributions of adult workers' experiences and opinions illuminating the class material and their own current work roles.

The learning process for adult students was described in a variety of perspectives. Adult students suggested two differing perspectives on cognitive and classroom structures in learning. One group believed in learning of expert knowledge structures which guided their actions of classroom and study involvement. They defined their task as memorizing and recalling this expert knowledge. Another group viewed learning as making meaningful connections and thus drawing a broader circle of actions of classroom, adult life roles, and study/learning involvement. Most adults valued their life experiences in learning, but noted differing usages of those life experiences based upon these two perspectives of cognitive and classroom structures of learning. In addition to their inclusion or exclusion of life experiences in their learning, adult students also reported a dual action perspective about learning and studying for the student role and for the adult learner role. In the first action perspective, adults conformed to the norms and expectations for a good college student and studied focused solely upon academic knowledge and classroom requirements. In the second action perspective, adult students focused their learning on personal interests and linked their past interests with current academic knowledge. For some students, these two perspectives were congruent in their acts as adult student learners; for other adults, these two were discrepant and conflictual. These adults created compartmentalization, a dichotomization between the two kinds of learning, and did not see the possibilities that learning could transcend context or initial intent of course goal or personal goal in learning.

Within the process of studying and learning, adult students also held varied views about access and use of out-of-class resources and people. Many adults made active use of others such as faculty, fellow students, family, friends, and work colleagues, as well as additional written and visual resources. In this focus upon external resources, a number of adults noted the value of a study skills course, as well as faculty-initiated learning-to-learn skills and suggested optional readings. Other adults focused upon themselves as their base of learning and the required resources of the course as the only base for studying and learning.

Learning also drew upon adult life role and adult student biographies. Most adults made meaning-making connections between their life roles and academic knowledge. For these adults, their college experience was enhanced both through their own particular backgrounds as workers, family leaders, and world citizens, as well as their past life experiences. Thus, as they spoke to learning and their related actions in the classroom experiences, they suggested differentiated and complex ways they made meaning of the content as well as judged knowledge, sources of knowledge, and efficacy of knowledge. Their current involvement in work, family, and other life roles did create important grounding and relevancy to their involvement in the classroom learning process. This learning also was viewed as knowledge and skill to improve their own families, work environments, communities, and the broader society.

Implications for Research:

- Adult undergraduate students were significantly different in their varied beliefs, actions, and related meanings of learning in the classroom and in their other life roles. These comparative differences occurred with entry or reentry status, with the nature of participation (part-time or full-time) in a particular institutional context, with the particular academic and institutional context of enrollment, with past educational and life history, and with lower- or upper-division standing. *There is need for research to develop a typology which maps these* *differentiated characteristics in learning actions among adult students.* This study could provide the basis for further exploration and identification of the varied student characteristics and related judgements and actions in the classroom and in specific learning activities.

- Adult students reported varied beliefs and actions in relation to the classroom. Adult students, particularly lower-division students, suggested they conformed to beliefs and values of traditionally structured classrooms, while upper-division students more often noted valuing highly flexible, more unstructured class experiences. In addition, most students noted particular sets of qualities of an acceptable, as well as an excellent faculty member. Adult students valued a connected in-class relationship with the faculty member, active cognitive engagements in the class session, a supportive community within the classroom, and also a class which supported particular student-defined rituals and routines of class participation and related studying activities. It was evident that most adult students operated on classroom beliefs from a socialized academic perspective. In addition, they also brought beliefs based upon their past and current adult life roles, from observations and judgements of different academic disciplines and kinds of faculty, and from beliefs of the nature of a learning experience within a community college, a public university, or an adult degree program. *Future research needs to explore both the beliefs which come from academic socialization as well as from adult life role socialization as they influence judgements and actions in the classroom learning environment.*
- Past cognitive research has examined learning from theories based in academic expert knowledge structures. However, these adults suggested both differential engagement between academic expert knowledge structures and their own real world knowledge structures as they engaged in collegiate classroom learning. Further, they actively made judgements focused solely upon memorizing and learning academic knowledge as separate and inclusive knowledge or used dual perspective judgements of academic and real world knowledge embedded within their collegiate and adult life role activities. *Future research should investigate the unique complexity of adult learners as they make meaning and create cognitive connections between both their real world lives of knowledge and action in relation to their academic world knowledge and actions.* In addition, it was evident that many adults utilized their life experiences in the classroom context for learning or utilized their classroom learning experiences in their family, work, or broader community world citizen role to expand upon their classroom knowledge and skills. Unlike young adult college students, adults have the opportunity to integrate knowledge and action in real world context. *Future research should investigate the particular cognitive actions by adult students which support this connection relationship*

between classroom and life roles, as well as explore classroom instructional strategies which support creation or development of additional connections and actions of theory and knowledge between classroom and life roles. Situated learning offers one important theoretical perspective to continue this line of investigation, as well as more specific examination of cognitive theories of adult student development of meaning-making.

- Faculty were pivotal to the experiences of adult students. Faculty were significant influencers of adult students' adaptation, beliefs about acceptance into the academic culture, and validation of adults as undergraduate students. Curiously, faculty behaviors and attitudes toward adult undergraduates remain largely unexplored. Findings from this study indicate that the adult students generally perceived favorable attitudes and treatment from faculty and felt that faculty particularly enjoyed adult students. Further, adult students believed that many faculty were respectful and held higher expectations for adult students than they did for younger students. Community college students also believed that faculty had to be supportive and helpful in adult student learning, if they were to succeed in college. *Research is needed to delineate faculty attitudes, actions, and expectations concerning adult students' experiences in the classroom. There is a need for further study of the faculty-student relationship when the student is an adult.*
- Adult students reported varied beliefs and experiences with age-integrated and age-segregated classrooms. *Research should continue to explore the ramifications of age-related classroom (both age-integrated and age-segregated) contexts on adult students' experiences and learning activities.*

Implications for Adult and Higher Education Practice:

- Adult students reported varied difficulties in entering or adapting to higher education and its youth-oriented environment in community colleges and public universities. These adults did adapt to the environment, yet noted specific difficulties. Special adult student programs, structures and faculty/staff attitudes were influential in creating a more accepting environment. Adults in adult degree programs, on the other hand, noted the direct value and importance of being in an adult-oriented environment. They felt understood, supported, and advanced into a more connected learning experience. In most contexts, faculty and key contact staff held a key role in the adult student's belief of initial acceptance or adaptation. *Lead practitioners need to rethink the institutional mission, faculty/staff actions, and academic program structures and systems which support adult students and communicate acceptance of adult students and their place within the institutions.*
- Faculty who invited adults to share and explore real world experiences in relation to the classroom setting were viewed as more relevant and

helpful to their learning processes. It was evident that there are specific skills which faculty need to develop to be effective facilitators of theory and practice of adult learners within the classroom context. *Lead practitioners need to identify helpful and appropriate ways for faculty to engage adult students in sharing and critiquing their life experiences in the context of the classroom.*

- Entry and recent reentry adult undergraduates reported limited prior knowledge of learning and study skills. The few students who experienced either a session or a course in study skills reported its significant value. *Faculty and staff need to develop strategies and programs which can develop effective learning-how-to-learn skills and study skills in the adult student population.* In particular, adult students reported the impact of faculty discussions about specific skills or actions to improve their learning, writing, or test-taking skills, as well as the impact of study skills courses. Faculty can be instrumental in aiding students in developing more effective and efficient skills for good learning and scholarship.
- Adult students noted differences of instructional style and learner engagement between the behavioral sciences, humanities, and professional studies of business/education/nursing and the hard sciences, mathematics, and engineering. It was evident that adult students believed there was often a non-supportive learning environment by the sciences, mathematics, and engineering for new or reentering adult learners in the classroom, particularly for those adults who had experienced a significant break in studies. *Lead practitioners in higher education need to develop advisement activities, background skills development programs, and support services for adults entering science, mathematics, and engineering courses.*
- *Because faculty-connected relationships are the primary institutional relationship of adult students, leaders in collegiate institutions should develop orientation programs or professional development seminars for faculty working with adult students.* Faculty need to be informed and to develop additional knowledge and skills regarding the significance of their actions for both supporting and retaining adult learners, but also in facilitating the adult learning process.

ADULT IMAGES OF STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

Adult student involvement was framed by both the adult student perceptions of the institution environment and the projected impact of that environment upon the student. Each student represented a unique history of high school or GED background, possible previous college or technical school involvement, as well as possible multiple collegiate enrollments in different parts of the country, military or work training, or professional research work activities. These past institutional and schooling experiences and the related past student learning experiences had a significant influence on the entry and reentry involvement of adult students. In addition, current interrelationships between their work, family, and self beliefs about college education also had a significant impact. Thus, involvement for students was highly contextualized within their past experiences and multiple roles. Adult student involvement was grounded in a dialectic between the perceived environment of the institution and the initial projected impact of that collegiate environment on the student.

Broad general themes are reported in the following paragraphs concerning adults in the community college, in the public university, and in an adult degree program in a private liberal arts college. In addition, several common themes across institutional settings will also be shared.

Adults who selected the community college valued its perceived psychological support and comfort. They believed that the institution provided the academic opportunity to succeed, often viewing it as a stair step towards academic progression to a four-year institution. Community colleges were judged to be more accessible, less expensive, less intimidating, more supportive, and a little bit less demanding, than the four-year setting. Community college faculty were believed to be instrumental in helping adults to succeed and to help adults demonstrate their capability as college students. Quality learning experiences at a community college were based upon supports for possible knowledge/skill deficiencies through the developmental studies program, and upon regular academic courses which were perceived as targeted to help students become competent in foundational academic knowledge. It was believed that faculty, staff, and related services paid special attention and support to students, including adult students.

Adult undergraduates selected a public university based upon a more self-confident attitude regarding their abilities to succeed and persist. They chose the public university because of its reputation, its importance, its complexity and specialization. Quality learning was linked to beliefs of a more prestigious, reputable degree from a major university, of greater academic demands and expectations upon students, and the capacity to offer a variety of specialized degrees. Learning was judged through adult entry into this more demanding environment; these adults believed that part of their involvement in learning reflected expertise sharing and meaning development.

The university environment was perceived as less flexible with a more difficult entry process for these adult undergraduates. These adults believed they had to adapt to the university. Often they reported difficulties with bureaucratic structures and routines, grounded in a young adult campus-bound student lifestyle. This young adult environment was a concern for these new and some reentry adults. They noted their actions to develop a self-defined comfort zone as an "adult" among younger students and faculty in the classroom. Most adults felt highly accepted and capable students among their youth peers after the first few semesters.

Because these adults entered with rusty knowledge and skills, they often expressed having difficulty with academic background knowledge and skills expectations in some of their courses due to a length of time away from studies. Many spoke to self-diagnosing and remediating uneven background skills and knowledge. These difficulties were more often discussed in relation to enrollment in mathematics, sciences, and English courses. They used a variety of strategies and resources to get up to the level of expectations. Some adults also reported disappointment at the lack of challenge and quality that was expected but that was not evident in some of their college courses. Adult undergraduates in public universities valued the quality of faculty and the perceived excellence and specialization of academic majors to meet their particular needs.

Adults selected an adult degree program at a private liberal arts college in the belief of a supportive, personalized, and more customized program targeted to adults. They judged the adult degree program as making a special commitment to the adult learner who desired to continue working and maintaining adult roles while also participating in undergraduate collegiate instruction. These adults perceived the private college as offering a quality degree, defined through the institutional reputation, small classes, and the specific attributes of the adult-designed program. Adult degree programs were valued by these students because they focused upon the adult learner and their work world. These programs were also believed to be supportive of the transition between past college academic experiences in relation to current collegiate requirements. Unlike public universities, these two adult degree programs were believed to be more supportive of the adult student's past academic collegiate experiences. Adult degree programs were particularly valued because of program support for adult academic scheduling requirements, integration of adult life and work experiences within class learning experiences, as well as the stylized accelerated nature of the degree program at one of the private liberal arts college research sites. Many of the students selected the adult degree program because of tuition reimbursement support from employers. Adult degree programs spoke directly to the explicit valuing of adults, their needs for access and their flexibility to meet adult life commitments.

Across all settings, adult undergraduate students believed that the quality of their involvement was centered within faculty-student relationships. Primary judgements about their education and learning rested on that reciprocal relationship. The more global institutional climate exerted minimal impact and was of minimal interest to these adults beyond issues of admission, registration, advisement, and academic policies. Although these adults were both full-time and part-time students, few discussed participation outside the classroom experience. They were at a college "to learn"; they were at college to be "good students." Further, most of these adults did not seek out or use student support services. Those who sought out collegiate experiences, desired experiences which reflected their adult status and their professional involvements. Most saw themselves as self-sufficient. Services or staff which were used by adults included support for entry, for social/professional connections, for remediation to supportive academic skills, or for handling policies to support a particular academic goal.

Implications for Research:

- Adult students in this study viewed their collegiate involvement as directly related to their student role in the classroom, their success as a learner, and their continuing success as a worker, spouse, family member, and community citizen. They judged the collegiate institution on the basis of beliefs and personal needs in relation to the institutional mission and climate. Each institution was selected by adults based upon their beliefs of quality. However, these beliefs and related characteristics of quality education differed among different students and contexts. Past theories of institutional climate and student involvement have focused upon young adult experiences or on certain collegiate landmarks (time with faculty outside of classes, student leadership offices, and other forms of student engagement outside of classes). It was evident in these students that institutional climate and collegiate involvement landmarks were often irrelevant, and sometimes inappropriate for most adult students. *Future research should continue the exploration of the nature of involvement for adult students, their delineation of institutional climate and fit for adult students, and the beliefs of quality of education in relation to the institution.*
- *Future research should redefine the nature of undergraduate education for adult students.* Adult students typically have to balance and integrate their undergraduate studies and involvement in relation to their other life roles. Past research has ignored this centrality of adult roles in the lives of adult students. Future research should reframe the concepts of involvement in undergraduate education based upon the adult life and its interrelationship among the classroom, work, family, and community. The key influencers of access and support from academic systems and support services should also be reflected in this reframed research.
- Support services appeared to have limited use by these adult undergraduates. Most of the needs expressed by adults concerned personal faculty and staff interventions, entry counseling, orientation, and academic-related support assistance. Most students raised major concerns about systems of registration, financial aid, parking, and academic procedures. These often created significant irritation because of limited access, efficiency, or conflictual policies among academic units for the student with limited time on campus. *Future research should re-examine the nature of the adult student, their particularistic needs, and the relevancy of general versus individualized support services for adults.*
- These adults were deeply influenced by the public image and reputation of a college or university. Some were also concerned with the institution's public image regarding acceptance of adult students. How can colleges and universities provide more effective programs, special structures,

and communications regarding their role and image as "adult-oriented" institutions? *Research could provide information regarding key mechanisms, strategies, and public relations activities in colleges and universities which influence adults to enroll in a particular institution and influence adult perceptions of institutional valuing of adult students.*

Implications for Adult and Higher Education Practice:

- Adult students do not enter a college directly from a high school as an information support base nor can they easily access staff to guide them in making decisions regarding college attendance. It was evident that adults experienced a trial and error approach in identifying their college and academic program of choice, as well as in identifying relevant academic supports related to entry-level academic knowledge and skills for specific courses of study. Although there were a number of orientation programs for freshmen and transfer students, these programs had limited relevancy to adult students. Adult students valued a customized orientation program which was accessible and appropriate for their needs. They also repeatedly described their first semester or quarter of involvement as a crucial time and a significant influence on reenrollment. *Adult and higher education practitioners should develop programs to facilitate the entry and academic success of adult undergraduates. All institutions should consider offering some form of assessment of knowledge and skill for entering adults related to classroom expectations of entry background knowledge.*
- *Lead practitioners in adult and higher education should reconsider how the institution can best support and serve adult students.* The study identified highly diverse adult students, a spectrum representing full-time students who were highly involved in campus activities to adult students who lived in a fragile existence between their part-time student role and their highly demanding roles of worker, family supporter, and spouse. Most of these students held as priority the importance of a quality classroom relationship and institutional academic supports. A subset of these students also valued participation in honor societies, campus cultural events, and, for a few who participated, in student government. Most students desired a collegiate climate which assumed part-time, evening students were a main clientele. Some of these students also reported desiring a campus climate which demonstrated support for students who had families, spouses, and work role commitments. They suggested that if the institution expected adults to have families and work involvements, the institution and its faculty/staff would act quite differently and create a very different type of collegiate environment. *Higher education practitioners need to think of this adult student diversity as they plan and engage services and organizations in support of adult students.*

- Adults in this study expressed serious concerns and weathered major tribulations in relation to the transfer of academic credit between institutions. *Policy makers and practitioners need to examine and evaluate policies and procedures that affect the transfer of credit among higher education institutions.* Many adults in this study had experienced three or four institutions in different parts of the country. They found their current involvement significantly complicated by academic "fiefdoms" surrounding academic credit equivalencies. It was evident that transfer agreements between community colleges and four-year institutions were important for adults and were key devices in their planning strategies. However, students who enrolled in public universities faced numerous problems. A number of adult students specifically chose an adult degree program over a public university because the program offered an assessment of academically equivalent life experiences which incorporated most of their prior college course work. It was evident that transfer credit issues were most dominant and problematic at traditional four-year institutional settings.
- *Policymakers and leaders in adult and higher education institutions need to re-examine and evaluate the policies and procedures governing financial aid for adult students.* The issue of financial aid for adult undergraduates is a critical one. Many adult students found that financial aid was created and administered in discriminatory ways. Numerous participants whose academic achievements more than met the standards used to award funds to traditional students found themselves ineligible for financial aid on the basis of age alone. Further, because they were supporting a family and working in a full-time job, they were eliminated from any institutional financial support considerations. Of all of the major issues cross-cutting institutional boundaries, financial aid was the most significant concern expressed by these students.
- Adult students are lifelong learners. However, higher education admissions and records have been established for a one-time, continuous, full-time enrollment directly out of high school. *Institutions need to redefine the nature of their commitments to quality student participation from a part-time and discontinuous enrollment.* Adult students desired collegiate support for varied scheduling of courses and varied class formats, as well as the process of reentry access. It was evident from adults who left college in their youth that they left for the right reasons—lack of motivation and goal orientation. They came back to college in adulthood also for the right reasons—committed motivation and goals. Unfortunately, many institutions appeared to keep the uncommitted inside the classroom (desiring to retain all students for a four-year continuous period) and to make it difficult for the committed and focused (students who had stopped out) to get back into the classroom. Several institutions were valued for creating special access

policies for reentry students. Enrollment and reenrollment issues also directly related to the adults' negotiations with self and others each semester for time and resources to continue their studies. Adults faced a balancing act between student, work, and family roles. Course enrollments each semester directly related to place, time, format, and specific topic for these adult students. *Practitioners need to continue to re-examine and act on issues of access, scheduling, and nontraditional forms of instruction to serve adult learners.*

ADULT UNDERGRADUATE AS FAMILY MEMBER, WORKER, AND CITIZEN

Adult students found that collegiate involvement injected a new set of priorities into their already full lives. Once they had become committed to undergraduate study and set a goal of degree attainment, successful performance as a student became a vital part of the lives of the participants. These new priorities linked with undergraduate study forced these adults to alter their typical role performance within the family structure. They found they needed to alter their usual actions and that they often needed to accept a different standard of performance as parent, spouse, son, or daughter. Responsibilities also had to be shifted to other family members and continued negotiation was needed to keep the family functioning smoothly. There were no ready made rules or guidelines to facilitate the decision making process and family members differed in their abilities to respond to the new needs of the adult college student. Since the priorities were continually shifting (one course might demand one level of work and performance while another required an increased level), the adult and his/her family members were confronted with the fact that there was no reasonable way to achieve balance or equity between family requirements and school demands.

What this amounted to was a demand for the family unit and individual members of the family to be willing to accept an uneven tradeoff. In order to support the adult student's goal and his/her performance as a student, other family members had to shoulder greater responsibilities, often with no direct benefit for themselves, but simply out of love and respect for their student family member. The family often had to act in a sacrificial way to support the adult student.

A key aspect of the student/family relationship was the adult students' need to feel that they were not alone in this endeavor and that the sacrifices were not overwhelming to the family. This was most often accomplished by conceiving of the degree pursuit process as a partnership. The most common form of partnership was between the student and his/her spouse. Other family members or even several family members, however, could also serve as partners. As a partner in collegiate involvement, the spouse looked to the future benefits that would be a result of degree attainment. The additional responsibilities taken on could thus be viewed as temporary additions that had a finite end and the student could feel less guilty about asking a spouse to take on additional responsibilities and tasks.

It was particularly difficult to reconcile children's needs for a parental presence and guidance with the demands to be absent from them in order to attend class, study, or complete assignments. Younger children, especially, had difficulty in responding to the rationality of future benefits when they needed a parental presence "now." Parents in this difficult position believed firmly that their demonstration to their children of excellence in study and educational achievement offset the loss of their immediate presence. They also felt their own educational experiences benefitted their children directly by allowing them to assist and enhance their children's learning.

Study participants who were employed on a full-time basis indicated that work occupied a central place in their lives. The majority worked well beyond 40 hours each week and were seeking a degree in order to alter one or more aspects of their work life. Those who were employed part-time were usually also full-time students preparing for career entry. Thus, work provided the primary motivation for collegiate involvement for almost all of the study participants. In fact, participants seemed to believe that, in the reality of today's world, the bachelor's degree had virtually become a work force imperative.

Thus, it was no surprise that participants who worked in a setting that actively supported collegiate involvement felt as though the cost to themselves and their families was warranted since the degree was valued and encouraged within the work place. In fact, for a clear majority of these adults, the financial support provided by employer tuition reimbursement programs was critical to their collegiate participation. In addition, for those who worked with colleagues who were "college educated," the degree was an important means for achieving greater social status in the work setting as well as a validation of their existing knowledge and competence.

Study participants represented a group of adults who not only desired a degree, but had acted on their desire. For most, coming to the point of action was a complex process. The modeling of other adult college students played an important function in the lives of participants, especially since the common social designation for college student is equivalent to "young adult." At the point of initiating college study, participants found role models among work peers and superiors, within their own families, and occasionally among friends and associates in the community. Once matriculated, however, they were able to identify role models in their classes. These models were important in establishing the adult's involvement and supporting continued collegiate involvement.

When the student role was embedded in the context of the complexities of adult life, participants found that the amount of available time and energy for degree pursuit limited them to a part-time attendance pattern. Part-time involvement, in turn, markedly extended the duration of involvement from inception to degree attainment. The majority of participants indicated a preference for full-time involvement, but few were able to realize this ideal. Consequently, most of these adults were faced with years of involvement in order to reach their goal. Some wondered whether they had the fortitude to continue to degree attainment and to exact the personal and family sacrifices needed. Others found that only the closest family members were able to sustain interest in their student pursuits when involvement dragged on for years.

The complexities of adult life also restricted the amount of time and energy an adult could "free" for study. Thus, even though they felt capable of superior performance, many of these adults had to effect an internal compromise with their desires and "settle for" less than their optimum performance as a student.

Past educational experiences influenced many participants. Those who had entered college immediately after high school and dropped out often contrasted their current attitudes with their youthful ones. They felt they now had a much higher level of motivation and were now very goal oriented where they had been aimless and lacking in goals as youths. Many felt that degree attainment as an adult would provide closure to their unfinished youthful involvement and that a high level of performance as an adult would compensate for poorly motivated youthful performance.

Even though significant motivation for involvement and continuance in higher education often originated in work-oriented factors such as promotion or career entry, once adults became involved in undergraduate study, other, more personally oriented motivations emerged. Many adults spoke of the immense personal satisfaction learning provided. Others spoke of the power of educational involvement and learning in enriching their self-concept and sense of personal identity. The student role provided many participants with a unique identity separate from their other adult life roles. They placed a high value on this identity and on its contribution to their sense of themselves as persons.

Among study participants, the community role proved to be the least influential of their many adult life roles. The majority had virtually completely curtailed their participation in community activities following involvement in undergraduate study. However, the majority had not had an active role in their communities prior to collegiate involvement with the exception of parents who had been extensively involved in children's recreational activities. In fact, only one subgroup of these adults openly expressed any sense of community responsibility. This was the subgroup of African American students who felt that their own communities and their geographic communities at large deserved to receive some of the personal benefits they expected to accrue from degree attainment. They expressed a desire to act on behalf of others in the community to open educational horizons for them.

Community involvement was primarily limited to participant's contacts with friends who were fully supportive of their student role. Friends were a particularly important source of support for unmarried participants who lacked a spouse's partnership. The most supportive friends proved to be those who were or had been students themselves.

Implications for Research:

- Study participants revealed that virtually all functions of the family from resource allocation to the launching of members into the larger community were affected by the inclusion of the adult college student role. The family's ability to maintain morale and to support and encourage its members was vital for success as an undergraduate. *Future research should examine the key function of family support for an adult member's collegiate involvement and incorporate broadly based views of family functions and their potential impact on adult collegiate involvement.*

- Study participants spoke minimally of role conflicts with other family members but often mentioned their dissatisfaction with the coping methods they had employed to resolve their own internal conflicts. Their inability to effect a "balance" among their roles was a source of frustration. *Future research should seek to uncover the full scope of varied means of coping with the internal as well as the external aspects of role conflict as it relates to adult students.*
- *Future research should examine the impact of employer tuition assistance programs and the characteristics of programs which correlate most highly with adult involvement and continuance in higher education study.* Adults in this study indicated that the rare adult, despite being a successful wage earner, can manage the expenses of a college education from a personal financial base. The lack of funds impairs adult involvement, the quality of that involvement, and their continued involvement to the point of degree attainment just as it does for the traditionally aged student.
- For these adults, the educational values of the work place played an important part in providing encouragement for initial collegiate involvement as well as support for continued involvement. A few adults cited special difficulties in employment situations where the environment was perceived as non-supportive of education. *Future research on organizational culture should pay special attention to the prevalent attitudes and beliefs about education within an organization and the influence of these on the employee who is seeking involvement in higher education.*
- Participants indicated a belief that various types of degrees hold distinctive places and varying values within many work settings. They expressed the assumption that the bachelor's degree had become the critical credential in employee evaluation at almost all points of working life: career entry, job change, employment after job loss, and promotion. *There is a need for future research to examine the use of the degree as a credential and its relationship to employee skills, ability and contributions.*
- The retrospective self-assessment of these adults indicated that dropping out of college is less often a definitive act of closure to further study or degree attainment than has been previously thought. In addition, they were able to offer some insight relative to youthful motivation and college involvement. While the correlation between additional involvement in formal education and number of years of prior involvement is well established, the motivational aspects of prior

experience have received little study. The experiences of these adults indicate that a desire for closure may provide a significant portion of the motivation of adults who reenter college with a youthful experience base. *The actual experiences of adults of all ages who reenter college and reach degree attainment should be utilized as a basis for further research on college dropouts and stopout patterns. Further, there is a need to understand the nature of the impact that youthful college experiences have on adult undergraduate study.*

Implications for Adult and Higher Education Practice:

- The experiences of these participants indicate that there are significant emotional issues surrounding a family's adjustment to adult involvement as a college student. The frustration level is high for the adult student and many deal with the powerful emotions of guilt and anger. *Practitioners working with adult reentry students may be able to facilitate continued adult involvement by providing opportunities for adults to deal with their specific school related feelings and by providing information regarding the typical adult responses to internal and external role and relational conflicts during specially designed adult student orientation programs.*
- It was clear that adult undergraduates in this study wanted their family members to understand their experiences as students. Opportunities to show family members where classes were held and even to show them what classes were like were important to these adults. Involving family members whenever possible in student related activities was also a means of linking student and family roles. *Personnel working with reentry and new entry adult students should consider ways to support the involvement of the student's family in orientation programs and at various points during the adult student's collegiate experience.*
- Participants noted the influence that appropriate role models had on entry and continued involvement in higher education. Adult peers who were classmates had the most sustained contact with participants and often provided the most guidance in terms of appropriate student behaviors. A number of these adults expressed a desire for opportunities to socially interact with other adult undergraduates beyond the classroom setting, but had little or no time to spend on activities outside of the classroom. *Institutions could benefit from the application of the peer mentor concept for new adult students. However, creative means of providing opportunities for adult-to-adult contact need to be found and are best based in a classroom-related time frame.* Since adult student role models in the work place are vivid examples that personify the value of a degree within the work force, *educational institutions interested in serving the adult student population should*

examine the potential of developing ways of promoting the visibility of adults currently enrolled at their institution within employment settings.

- **Time spent in degree pursuit was a significant issue for almost all of the study participants. Many were profoundly dissatisfied with the restrictions of part-time involvement. Those who chose the accelerated adult degree program were willing to make a high physical, social, and emotional sacrifice in order to complete their degree in a limited time period (in most cases less than two years).** ***Postsecondary educational institutions should be encouraged to critically examine program structures other than the traditional series of semester-long college courses and to seek ways to avoid duplication of effort and decrease the amount of time required for completion of degree requirements.***

CONCLUSIONS

From *Wouldn't Take Nothing For My Journey Now,* Maya Angelou comments:

> Some people who exist sparingly on the mean side of the hill are threatened by those who also live in the shadows but who celebrate the light.
> It seems easier to lie prone than to press against the law of gravity and raise the body onto its feet and persist in remaining vertical.
> There are many incidents which can eviscerate the stalwart and bring the mighty down. In order to survive, the ample soul needs refreshments and reminders daily of its right to be and to be wherever it finds itself. (1993, p. 79)

Adult undergraduates are celebrating the **light** of higher forms of knowledge and knowing. They see a collegiate world, a society, and their own personal world which, at times, holds them down. These adults spoke to their belief in becoming whatever they desired for themselves. All they asked was access, understanding, support, knowledge, and the opportunity. Undergraduate higher education should join them in moving beyond the shadows.

Appendix A

ALLERTON COLLEGE[1]

An Adult Degree Program in Applied Organizational Management

Allerton College is a private liberal arts college, founded approximately 200 years ago in the town of Grantsburg which is about 70 miles from the metropolitan area of West City. Nine years ago Allerton College inaugurated the Professional Studies Program, which features uniquely designed adult undergraduate and graduate programs offered at off-site locations. Allerton's literature describes these programs as "adult-oriented, practical, convenient, and efficient." During the 1992-93 academic year, 600 students were enrolled in these programs. Cost per semester hour is $175.00.

Participants in this study were attending the West City location, which enrolls 275 students in both undergraduate and graduate adult degree programs. The West City offices are lodged in a renovated older building with a variety of other businesses. Centrally located in West City, the setting is corporate in appearance, with ample parking and easy access by interstate. This site has staff offices, classrooms, and a well-equipped student lounge. In the office suite and student lounge area, pictures and artifacts feature the main campus, its historical roots, and the academic tradition of a liberal arts college. Students access regional libraries for their course work and conduct all college business at the site.

The Bachelor of Science in Applied Organizational Management is the only undergraduate adult degree program offered at the West City location. It is an upper-level program (junior/senior year) with admission based on 60 lower-division credit hours completed with a grade of C or better and two years of prior significant work experience. The program features a cohort group experience of 12 to 15 students who as a group follow a sequential fixed curriculum for a 15-month period. Students attend a four-hour class once a week with another four hours each week in a study group of two to six people formed from within the cohort. The accelerated curriculum features courses of four to six weeks in length. Requirements to complete the baccalaureate include a final capstone research paper. Students can choose to participate in a portfolio assessment of academically equivalent life experiences, contributing up to 24 hours of course credit in the program.

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[1] All names have been changed to provide anonymity.

Background to the Study

This qualitative multiple case study examined the experiences of adult undergraduates. Twenty undergraduate adults were interviewed at the Allerton, West City site. The sample of ten men and ten women ranged in ages from 27 to 51 years with an average age of 36. Thirteen were married; five were divorced and two were single. Nineteen of the sample were Caucasian, and one was African-American. All but one were currently employed. Half of the students held management level positions, with the remainder most often employed in jobs of a technical nature.

The following descriptive summary of the study presents the key themes identified across the 20 interviews. This summary is presented in two parts. Part One describes the participants' lives and actions as they became involved and progressed through the Allerton adult degree program. Part Two addresses their experiences in the Allerton classroom and program as a whole.

Part One: Adult Perception of Life that Includes College

Reasons for Involvement

Prior experience in higher education was a major aspect of these adult students' background. Nine had attended a four-year institution and a community college; three of these held associate degrees. Three others had experience only at a four-year school and four had only community college experience; two of the latter held associate degrees. Two had no prior college experience; one had been to business college and one had mixed prior experiences. For those who had begun a degree program as young adults and dropped out, obtaining the degree had "always been in the back of my mind." There was often a sense of "unfinished business."

For others, obtaining a degree had been a lifelong ambition or dream. Those who had no chance to obtain a bachelor's degree as a young adult saw the undergraduate degree as a door of opportunity. Finally, for others, a desire for job advancement or need for greater employment security combined with a personal desire for education motivated degree pursuit.

Many struggled with the decision because pressures and responsibilities in their work and family lives seemed to conflict with degree pursuit. Allerton's program was attractive because of its accelerated pace and general management focus. Further, it was viewed as efficient and "hassle free." However, some viewed the program as the best alternative to another preference; there was no other college in the area that gave them the same "leg-up," speed of completion and evening access. The most commonly desired alternative was a degree with a technical focus (engineering or computer science) which was inaccessible because required courses were offered only during work hours or because a specific sequence of required courses could not be completed given other life responsibilities.

Allerton's flexibility in accepting prior course work from other programs and schools was highly valued. These adult students found that other public universities considered their past course work to be inadequate for degree program requirements. For example, one individual had 134 prior credit hours, but his or her preferred major required 70 additional hours. Other institutions were also very unpredictable about scheduling courses and often failed to accommodate adult needs for part-time and evening participation. Thus, Allerton was chosen because it provided the required course work when needed, in a relevant, applied format during accessible evening hours, and did not impede progress toward a degree.

Key Motivators for Involvement

As they reflected upon their involvement, these adult undergraduates identified three major desires that lent value to a degree and motivated participation in the degree program. They noted 1) their desire to gain a credential; 2) their desire to become a college-educated person; and 3) their evolving commitment to learning.

The Educational Credential Issue

Job pressures were the most dominant driving force for provoking degree pursuit for these students. Most participants felt great pressure to get a degree and educational credentials. One commented that "... the impact of not finishing school has been tremendous ... it has set me back career wise a few years ... to go where I want to go, you've got to have a degree." Many were "job experience rich but degree poor." In the past, work experiences had allowed them upward mobility in the employment setting without the degree. Some found that their work experience combined with credit from prior college courses provided access to a position because it was seen as "equivalent to a college degree" in the work setting. However, such access quickly became a trap because a college degree was necessary to *remain* in the position. Many reported they could not be promoted, could not keep their job, or could not locate a comparable job without the degree. On the whole, these adults valued their educational involvement based on expectations that they would become eligible for higher salaries or advancement. They believed that the degree would give them a competitive edge; four displaced participants felt they would be able to access jobs comparable to those they had left with the degree credential in hand, and would increase job security. Some sought support for a career move into a different field or into a more secure and challenging position.

Self as a College-Educated Person

Many of these adult learners perceived social and personal inequities in their work setting where the bachelor's degree and related college-level knowledge and skills were emphasized. These adult students felt a college degree would enhance their social status in the work environment and would increase their competence by providing needed knowledge and skills. Many of the interviewed students held management-level positions and were surrounded by those who "look[ed] down their nose, because you didn't have a degree." Thus, these participants felt excluded from the world of the company's college-educated management group. One person captured this feeling: "As far as personal goals, I work in an environment where everybody has a ... four-year degree, and I want to be able to say I've got one too. You guys aren't any better than I am."

These learners wanted to be "competent, educated workers." They wanted the *educated abilities* commonly associated with a degree, such as skilled oral and written communication and the ability to work with ideas. One said, "It's important to me to be able to carry on an intelligent conversation and to be around people who . . . [carry on] intelligent conversations." Another expected that his education would create a better, happier life-style with knowledge about the broader world. Since his involvement in the program, another student reported, "I like to feel like I am a competent person and I really enjoyed that part . . . I got to where I got to feel real good about myself . . . and I don't have to be ashamed."

Commitment to Learning

Many of these students noted that they now value the "experience of learning." Most felt they truly enjoyed being a college student, and prized the associated intellectual stimulation, the "mental high." For this group of individuals, the Allerton experience was part of a developing lifelong learning habit, or a revelation of the joy of learning that was previously unknown. Fifty percent of the group expressed plans to pursue a graduate degree. Others planned to be involved in further elective formal classes.

Not all of the students reported this enjoyment or commitment to continued learning. A few felt "burned out," or failed to enjoy the social context and academic demands of a classroom learning experience. This subgroup specifically pointed to the accelerated program and its high toll on them, their energies, and their lives. Some suggested it was like standing in front of a fire hose with water gushing on you; you could only stand it so long.

Major Influences on Participation

Filling the multiple adult roles of student, worker, spouse, parent, friend, and community citizen created continued conflict in the participants that demanded negotiation among key areas of life in order to manage time pressures. Concerns about the financial impact of participation were also common.

Time-related Issues

Each of these students expressed difficulty in fitting time for school and study into a life already overflowing with work, community, and family responsibilities. They talked about three different perspectives of time which influenced their degree pursuit. First, many had reappraised their life goals and commitments as they came to perceive a finite adult life. They felt they had no "time to waste" either for prolonged degree pursuit or to postpone career goals contingent on a degree. Although they reported compliments on their courage to be a college student, they also noted that others seemed perplexed by their desire to be a student "at their age." Some reported jealousy in co-workers. These found needed support and encouragement for participation among family members, significant others, and college-educated co-workers and friends.

The second perspective of time was centered in the realities of daily life — the push and tug of life commitments with the academic program imperatives. It was a time of high stress, pressure, and anxiety. They spoke to heartfelt difficulty in portioning their limited time, attention, and resources among family, work, and themselves (personal time). Sandwiching themselves among many significant roles provoked "ulcers"; competing responsibilities "killed" them. Many reported work commitments of ten to twelve hours a day. Some commuted 45 minutes to 1 and 1/2 hours to each class session. The high costs of meeting job and school demands came largely at the expense of their families, community lives, and themselves. Only a few talked about changes in work responsibilities that accommodated college work. Often family relationships were the point of greatest stress. Several spoke of realigning family tasks and dealing with family frustrations. Many reported decreased involvement in their children's extracurricular activities; most eliminated personal hobbies, community activities, and church involvements. One stated, "... the part I didn't like was just taking away from my family — When you take 3 years away from your kids and 3 years away from your wife ... it's a big price to pay. I didn't realize it when I started what price I was going to have to pay."

The third perspective of time was directly related to the intensity and pace of the program. Participants mentioned a need to "get up to speed" and to learn how to sort out and emphasize the "important" content. The accelerated pace produced a continual focus on the future. There was constant reference to "just x more months and this will all be over." Keeping one's sight on the future meant being single minded. One called it "tunnel vision"—focusing chiefly on whatever supported success in the program. Movement through the accelerated program was often compared to a race. Completion of each course was like passing another "mile marker" on the race course. One could not afford to fall behind or all would be lost. In order to cope with this pace, these adults often established a set routine that became "lawlike" in its effects. Scheduled "school" time was held inviolate. Even if circumstances changed, such as a night off from a particular class, the time was used for a school-related activity.

Financial Issues

Most of the students were the major household providers and were concerned about maintaining their earning capacity for their family's sake. Even though they hoped for a matching occupational reward to counteract high educational costs, they noted that participation placed significant financial demands upon a family's often limited resources. Fifteen percent paid entirely from their own personal resources; the majority (85%) received some form of employer assistance for tuition and fees. In some cases, this assistance freed them from additional program costs. However, for most, additional financial sources were required; almost one-third of those receiving employer assistance used personal earnings to supplement costs. One-fourth required three different sources of funds. Beyond the usual academic expenses, most faced additional costs for commuting each week, fees for portfolio assessment, and additional course-related research and paper presentation costs. When asked about negatives associated with college, the program cost and related expense were mentioned most often.

Part Two:
Adult Perceptions of the Institution and the Classroom

Adult-Oriented Institution

Allerton College offered a degree program and personnel who were supportive and "caring." The term "customer-oriented" was often used to communicate positive regard for this adult-oriented environment. One participant noted, "There's very few hassles here. That means I write a check and they set down all the books I need for the whole semester right in front of me. That means I write a second check and I have registered and paid for an entire semester . . . that's it. I park right out in front . . . no parking sticker. I know exactly what my class schedule will be from now until the day I graduate. People that work don't have time for this other crap that you have to go through at a traditional school."

Allerton was often compared to previously attended institutions. The regional university was often criticized for its distancing, lack of concern, and inefficiency. "My main problem with the University [Fremont University] is they are just very uncaring. It's not that any one person was rude or anything like that, but it's just the whole system. They're very inefficient [discussion of parking, registration, and advisement]." Comparisons between community colleges and Allerton were favorable; both offered a "personal touch" including concerned professors who cared about each student's success and personnel who went "out of their way" to meet the adult student needs.

Accelerated and Sequential Curriculum

The accelerated program was desirable for a variety of reasons. Some simply wanted to avoid spending 8 to 10 years in a part-time, upper-level evening degree program. For others, immediate needs associated with their work situation demanded haste. The Allerton program was responsive to their need for a "reasonable" time commitment for degree attainment. For a few, a program of 15 months seemed a feasible commitment in their lives, considering their perceptions of skill deficiencies and doubts about their skill as students. They were not sure they could personally persist or survive in a longer program.

The Allerton program had a clear impact on student views of learning. Most valued studying one subject at a time. They believed this format allowed for concentrated and focused coverage. There was a recognition that learning itself was, at times, compromised by the sheer rapidity and amount of material to be covered in a few weeks. Thus, the best instructors were judged by their ability to emphasize the "high spots," indicating what must be learned and what could be skimmed if needed. Such instruction also avoided "wasting time" with unnecessary or useless information. The participants described good students as highly efficient and well-organized. These characteristics usually reflected being well-prepared (most of the time); being able to share ideas about content and practical examples of application based on work experience; and carrying their "weight" and responsibilities in study group assignments.

There were a few students who were concerned about the pace of content coverage. They wanted to invest more time and effort in topics of interest that were only briefly covered in a course. Their concern over abbreviated coverage led to projections for future individual learning efforts when time became available at the end of the program. In addition, a number of students reported "burn-out" syndrome as they neared program completion. They were worn-out, tired of studying and writing papers. They wanted a "vacation" from any learning. These two subgroups often suggested program changes: add a week to at least some of the major courses, or include a week's break between courses. However, they noted that such actions also posed drawbacks. While the current program was too fast-paced to reasonably participate and learn in the minds of these students, lengthening it would alter its attractiveness. Thus, the accelerated nature of the Allerton program was both its best and worst feature.

Portfolio Experience

Part of Allerton's program was based on portfolio assessment—the development of documentation and the determination of the academic credit hour equivalence of past life experiences. Because some of the adults brought significant amounts of previously earned credit into the program while others did not, not all participants participated to the same degree in the portfolio assessment. For nearly all, the portfolio experience was a "watershed" experience in the program. Placed as the second course of the curriculum sequence with a major emphasis on written communication and the preparation of the portfolio documentation, it was viewed as a "make or break" point in the program. Those unable to meet course expectations usually failed to continue in the program. Those who "made it through" found the remainder of the program more manageable. They reported greater ease with written work, increased confidence in classroom presentations, and an increased sense of self-worth. They came to believe that they could succeed and complete the program. For many, the events in this course were poignant and even transforming experiences. For those not involved with portfolio documentation, the required autobiography proved to be extremely powerful in its impact on their sense of self- worth. They seemed to gain increased self-understanding and identity clarification.

The Intersection of the Classroom and the Outside World

The adult degree program was designed to be collaborative, experiential, and applied. Participants valued this format. They spoke with positive satisfaction about the joint focus on traditional content and application. These students felt that class content examined and understood through life examples and practice-based problems was one of their most positive college experiences. As one noted, "When I can apply it to my real world experiences, then it makes sense to me." They particularly valued the unique perspectives and experiences of class members who came from highly diverse businesses, positions of responsibility, and value sets. They commented on the value of seeing those from diverse backgrounds work together to achieve the degree.

Program instructors exemplified the union of content and experience. These instructors were practitioners who made their living applying the content in their work settings. One stated, "Here again, most of these instructors . . . they are teaching based on the text, as well as their practical experience." The faculty role in the classroom was defined as that of facilitator, co-learner, and co-instructor with the students. Consequently, students perceived that faculty didn't bring the same faculty roles they had experienced at their universities and colleges. "They were more mentors." Acting as facilitators, these instructors created an interactive, collaborative experience, drawing upon readings, student experiences, and small study group assignments.

The study participants believed that the goal of learning was not only knowledge retention, but application and testing at the work site. Thus, the better courses directly affected their current work. By the same token, there was greater questioning and judging of courses which did not appear to have "practical application." Those with less concern for direct application emphasized using knowledge to develop broad and more finely tuned perspectives of their world, such as "tuning into" economics through newspaper reports of the stock market.

The Impact of Varied Academic Social Relationships

The undergraduate learning experience was often defined by highly individualistic pursuits. Within the Allerton program, however, learning was also a "social, collaborative affair." The cohort group experience and the weekly study group were significant aspects of learning.

Typically, the study group was viewed as one of the most important components of the entire program. The study group provided three major contributions. First, the group become a friendship network which supported each individual through good and bad times. Secondly, the study group provided cumulative energy to accomplish the required assignments, which were often viewed as formidable and overwhelming for an individual. Said one study group member, "It took every one of us [in the study group] to get through that class." Lastly, the study group provided significant experiential learning beyond the in-class session.

These students noted that a key ingredient in their success and welfare was the special camaraderie of the study group and the support of their cohort classmates. Members often supported one another by urging dispirited others to stay in the program and finish. The study group was attributed with keeping at least four of the participants in the program. However, not all study groups were positive experiences. Difficulties occurred when group dynamics were ineffective or when group members were perceived as lacking commitment or failing to carry their "weight." Changing study group composition prevented some students from realizing the benefits of this aspect of the program.

Supportive Class Environment

Participants noted that the supportive class environment contributed to their success. The key element was most often the friendships developed within the cohort and study groups, but the attitudes and behaviors of instructors were also credited with significant impact. Many of these adult undergraduate students returned to college with initial concerns about rusty or underdeveloped abilities and skills for academic work. Thus, these students valued instructors and staff who understood their needs and offered to work with them to improve the needed skills. In particular, most students valued instructors who "cared whether you were learning the material, whether you understood the material."

They saw faculty and adult students as having a professional, collegial relationship. Many students suggested that faculty and adult students had a "different rapport" at Allerton by comparison with the typical college classroom. They felt that instructors valued adult students because adult students engaged in the content, actively participated in classroom dialogue, and offered instructors and fellow students alternative views and descriptions of content application.

Adult student/faculty rapport was supported by the student's physical location in the classroom. The customary, semicircular classroom seating arrangement allowed each student a "front row" sense of closeness to the professor. Closeness meant removal of distractions with no visual impediments; thus nothing was "missed." Closeness also meant a sense of "connection to the professor and the class content."

The supportive classroom set aside some of the usual classroom rules and protocols to make "allowances" for factors in these students' lives. Many reported faculty who understood job and family commitments, such as out-of-town trips or the need to finish a meal in class due to a long drive or no dinner time. "I think one of the strongest influences, as far as my success as a student . . . an adult student . . . has been the fact that I have been treated as an adult." Thus, there was a respect and dignity given the adult that further supported a sense of equality in the classroom.

The Allerton College adult degree program in Applied Organizational Management reflects a unique academic program embedded within an adult-oriented environment. There is evidence indicating that undergraduate education has a broad impact in the lives of these participating adults.

Appendix B

BAYVILLE COMMUNITY COLLEGE[1]
Adult Lower-Division Undergraduate Students

Bayville Community College (BCC) is a multi-mission technical community college serving a region that includes rural and metropolitan areas. The promotional literature notes, "Hire Education or Higher Education—these are two of the educational choices students have when they come to Bayville Community College." The College offers arts and sciences degrees in 37 areas and technical degrees in 24 areas. In the fall of 1992, BCC enrolled 7,800 students; 5,580 at the main campus and the remainder at two satellite campuses. Over 600 students were enrolled at more than one campus. Some 54% were enrolled in college transfer programs, 30% in technical associate degree programs, and 16% were unclassified students. The average age of the student population was 26.4 years, with 42% over the age of 25. Most courses were three semester hours. Tuition per credit hour was $41.00 (in-state) and $158.00 (out-of-state).

BCC's main campus is located half way between metropolitan West City and the town of Elmwood, a technological center for research and related activities. The main campus, dedicated in 1986, reflects Bayville's recent growth. Three major buildings are surrounded by open fields and large parking lots. The services and facilities typical of established technical community colleges are available here. The two satellite campuses are located within an hour's drive of the main campus. One satellite is located in the small community of Summerville, and the other, Center Street campus, is located in downtown West City.

The BCC remedial/developmental program is required of students based on entry placement tests. About 40 percent of incoming students enroll in one or more of the developmental studies courses in reading, English, and math. All developmental studies students are also required to participate in a study skills course.

Background to the Study

This qualitative multi-site case study examined the educational experiences of adult undergraduates. Fifteen adult undergraduates were interviewed at Bayville's main campus. The study sample consisted of adults who had completed developmental studies requirements, were designated as college transfer students, and had completed at least 15 hours of lower-division credit course work. There were seven women and eight men ranging in age from 31 to 59 with an average age of 42. Seven of the fifteen were married, six were divorced, one was single, and one gave no response. All were Caucasian. Nine were full-time students, five were part-time students. Nine (primarily full-time students) participated in campus activities outside of the classroom. Five were currently employed full-time; four held part-time jobs off campus; two were working part-time on campus; and two gave no response.

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[1] All names have been changed to provide anonymity.

The following descriptive summary presents the key themes identified across the 15 interviews. Part One deals with the students' life experiences, actions and beliefs as they became involved in college study. Part Two presents their perceptions of the classroom and campus environment.

Part One: Adult Perceptions of Lives that Include College

Reasons for Involvement

There were a variety of motives for involvement in formal education. The majority of the participants had a career-related goal. Often they were concerned about marketable skills and about being able to compete in the marketplace. Five of the group had chosen to leave "dead-end" jobs or had been laid off and were seeking to re-enter the job market. Four were entering the job market essentially for the first time, wanting a "good job" and a reasonable degree of job security. Two had an atypical career goal in that they were preparing for gainful employment during retirement. The majority were seeking a degree in a professional area such as nursing, engineering, or education. Four were considering post baccalaureate study in the future. One participant, however, indicated that, although she was pursuing a degree and had been promoted in the past because of her college involvement, her primary motivation for degree attainment at the present time was personal satisfaction. She did not anticipate any occupational gain after attaining the degree. Only one participant was uncommitted to degree attainment. This individual primarily sought personal fulfillment and growth in the pursuit of undergraduate learning and was weighing the value of degree completion in light of current life circumstances.

Although the predominant focus was to improve economic status, the majority also talked about meeting intellectual and emotional needs through college attendance. They mentioned the "need to learn," a "driving curiosity," the enjoyment that accompanies learning, and the pleasure of effectively meeting an intellectual challenge. They valued the increased self-esteem that came from succeeding as a student and from gaining socially valued credentials. Going to school was viewed as a means of taking control of one's life. They viewed this educational opportunity as creating a means that would change their lives in significant ways. Others talked about the positive value of being a role model for their own children and for other young adults. For those who had been unable to attend college after high school, there was sometimes a sense of "recaptured" youth. One student related that "... now that I'm back in college, I'm going to bring back those years, regardless of how old I am. And I'm going to enjoy them."

Factors Influencing Entry

Life Transitions, Goals and Commitments

A number of the adult students spoke about the influence of a major life transition, crisis, or significant life event on the decision to go to school. Divorce and the need to be financially self-sufficient propelled several single mothers. The "empty nest" was a developmental crisis that affected other female students as they sought to develop new interests and to expand their lives. The developmental crisis of retirement was influential in the lives of some of the male participants. These men explored new social outlets and economically useful skills and abilities. Yet another group of these students felt their decision to go to college grew out of unfulfilled goals and dreams. They had wanted to attend college after high school or had tried to complete a previous course of study and had been unable to do so. Another group desired a better life for themselves and their children and/or wanted to be free from public assistance. Education was a means to achieve this life goal. Several students reported a sense of "anomie," a lack of meaning in their lives. They saw college involvement as a way to obtain more desirable work. They described their prior work as lacking in meaning, as well as personally and professionally limiting. There was also a group of students who "grew into" college attendance. Initially, this group took courses to explore or to test their ability to succeed as students. They also expected a degree to lead to a better life.

Past and Present Life Circumstances

Other factors also affected collegiate involvement. Some dealt with very difficult past life histories or trying current life circumstances. In particular, past educational experiences played a significant role. Nearly one-half of the participants had not finished high school, but had eventually completed a GED. For many of these individuals, successful completion of the GED was an impetus to considering college-level work. One participant dropped out of high school in the ninth grade and "never dreamed" that success as a college student was possible until coming to Bayville and achieving close to a 4.0 GPA. Another student had been disabled, but found that the disability "has given me a chance to go back [to school]." Eight had prior experience at a four-year institution; two had attended another community college.

Financial Issues

The majority of the participants were motivated to attend Bayville because its costs were significantly lower than the other local higher education institutions. The availability of financial aid was also a critical factor. More than one-half (53.3%) of the students used two or more sources to meet financial needs. The remainder used a single source. Financial needs were met through grant(s), personal savings, earnings, scholarships, and spousal support. One-third (33%) of the interviewed group received some grant support. Many students revealed financial concerns. A number of students reported that they and their family members had learned to get by with the "basics" in order to go to school. For single parents with children the financial hardships were often significant. Most were determined to persevere despite financial struggles.

Beliefs about Becoming a Student

Participation in college for these adults involved a cluster of beliefs and self-perceptions about school and being a student. Aside from possible difficult external circumstances, these students often dealt with initial internal self-doubt and questioned their ability to be a successful student. They frequently expressed initial concern over their ability to learn. Even those who had been highly successful in other life roles questioned whether they could still learn "at their age." These adults also wondered whether they could compete with younger students, and felt that the professor would judge them on the basis of their older age and therefore discount them as learners. For these individuals, this initial set of concerns was usually eased by key experiences which signaled that they were capable. These signals were varied and included such things as successfully teaching others a skill, obtaining the GED, or achieving a good grade in an initial developmental studies course. Some of these individuals were initially tentative about commitment to a degree. They often would "test themselves and the possibilities" by seeking out a course at BCC to see if they could "make it in the collegiate world."

Learning how to act like a student was also of great concern. For some, study skills were rusty or not easily recalled. For others, the college setting was completely new and provoked concerns about behavior and appropriate dress. One such individual commented that, "I didn't know what to do . . . to say . . . to wear. I was . . . just lost." These concerns also influenced their goals. Some doubted that they could finish a four-year program. They decided that they would start out with a two-year degree. Upon successful completion of the associate's degree, they would then commit to the pursuit of a bachelor's degree. In these discussions, many noted the importance of the transfer agreement between BCC and the public university. They were assured that their efforts would not be wasted and that their courses would transfer to meet the prerequisites for their potential major.

Entering the Student World

Not unexpectedly, the first course for these adults proved to be highly significant. If they achieved a "good grade," they felt they had passed a meaningful hurdle and that they could be successful with future courses. Some students even set up a "self-test" in their first course enrollment by choosing a required course or a previously valued subject from their earlier schooling years. Success as a student led them to a review of themselves and their progress. "I'm sure not as scared as I was . . . going to college . . . [It's] not as hard as you heard or imagined." One summarized, "I've grown from the inside and know who I am and what it is that I want."

Most of these adults were concerned that others in their lives couldn't fully understand and relate to the realities of the student role. Because most of these participants were full-time students, they viewed their student involvement as pivotal. Others in their lives did not necessarily view it with the same intensity and importance. As a result, some did not even discuss their classes with family or friends. In most cases, those who gave the most sensitive and relevant understanding were fellow students or persons who had been college students themselves. From a different perspective, the logistics of being a student were usually supported and encouraged by family, key friends, faculty, and staff. A few found no support whatsoever among friends or family; one reported having books burned by a spouse, who stated, "You're too stupid." For these individuals their own sense of commitment and self-belief were critical.

Participating in the student world brought pleasure and satisfaction as well as hard work. The joys of students were many, including expansion of personal horizons, satisfaction of intellectual curiosity, realization of a long-felt desire (to go to college), and an increased sense of "belonging." These adults found the opportunity to interact directly with a teacher a particularly enjoyable aspect of learning.

Time-Related Issues

There were also significant difficulties as a student focused on time. The 24-hour day just wasn't long enough for most of these adult undergraduates. "You can't keep 'em balanced" was the way one student captured this dilemma of juggling multiple roles. Time management and personal discipline became vital skills for these students. One student commented that it was necessary to "limit yourself to a certain amount of time to be spent on things instead of doing what you want to do." Virtually all other social, community, and personal leisure involvements were suppressed because of the student role. The student role and time demands were especially difficult for single parents. Younger children often responded with "jealousy" or "resentment," while older children did not readily assume additional home tasks to support the student parent. These adults found various ways to cope, including having children study with them and participating in special events that focused attention on their children. These adults believed that their student role was a positive model for their children. Their participation revealed a commitment to education and good study habits.They also often exchanged grade reports with their children. It was interesting to note that 13.3% had families in which every member was a student.

Accommodating the time demands of the student role also influenced work. Some of these students tried to manage time by finding jobs that would more readily accommodate a school schedule. One left a full-time job to begin a consulting business; others found that part-time work best fit their needs for adaptable schedules.

Part Two:
Adult Perceptions of the Institution and the Classroom

Nature of the Institution

Bayville Community College was viewed in two very different ways, based upon the student's previous experiences or lack of experience with other higher educational institutions. For those without previous higher education (60% of the participants), Bayville was a particularly helpful and supportive environment for academic and personal growth. They characterized Bayville as a "good first time campus . . . I think everybody here's been supportive." They valued the smaller classes, the personal attention and the readily available help from staff and instructors. This college experience, they believed, made a significant and dramatic difference in their lives. Many had experienced difficult life circumstances. "They [Bayville] helped me to realize the potential that I didn't realize I had . . . And I'm sure there are a lot of people like myself, who never did very well until they came here in any aspect of their life." These first-timers believed that their ability to enroll in formal education and be successful was related to the mission of Bayville Community College. Many reported the value of starting at a smaller satellite campus, moving to the large campus of Bayville, and now focusing upon the next step, the move to the larger public university. "I am glad I went to Bayville first . . . I feel like I'm ready for a bigger place . . . [For] some reason they [college professors] sounded so intimidating a long time ago; but now I find they are just people . . . so I'm less intimidated and more excited."

Three participants who had experienced other post-secondary educational institutions saw Bayville differently. They were concerned that it was underdeveloped and lacking in diversity of services and activities. One called it "unsophisticated"; another called it "too much like a stupid high school"; and a third suggested that Bayville was still oriented to the younger student and had not differentiated its policies to support adult evening students. These individuals felt Bayville did not have a clear commitment to adult students. They desired a better evening class schedule, more full-time instructors who could be accessible to evening students, and adult student supports such as day-care and a quiet place for older students to study and meet other older adults.

Developmental Studies

Developmental Studies was often described as one of the most significant and valuable campus experiences. Most of the participating adults felt that developmental studies had been very important to their success. "Oh, I'd have been lost if they had put me in regular [classes]." (Only two of the students questioned the value of developmental courses, noting they were a time waster.) In most of these discussions, the specific value of the study skills course was cited as extremely important and helpful. "Even now, three semesters later . . . I catch myself doing things in my college-level courses that I was taught to do in developmental study skills . . . but they are very good techniques to study and learn better and to do well on tests." As these students spoke to their efforts to master materials, they spoke to a extremely broad repertoire of activities from reviewing notes and various reading strategies, to the use of other learning aids. Notes from class and textbooks were often "translated" into their own language using an outline format or a word processor. One-fourth of the group used flash cards. Several sought additional resources such as medical dictionaries, encyclopedias, and high school textbooks (often for mathematics and science courses). Those who used flash cards often asked their families to quiz them on definitions, concepts, or key information. Most of these students believed that they learned best through repetition. "Some of it don't [sic] make a bit of sense to me until I read it the second time and then hear the teacher go over it and then sometimes I have to get the teacher to spend a little time with me to explain it."

The Classroom Experience

To be a good student at BCC, one was expected to represent a "work ethic" commitment to the student role. These students believed that good students were hardworking and "put in the effort" by being diligent in attendance, by completing all assigned work, by being respectful of the teacher and the class, and by actively listening and taking notes. Many spoke to the importance of commitment to the tasks of the class, of being self-disciplined in completing all the class requirements, and of making learning activities pivotal in their lives. As one described it, ". . . [a good student] applies themselves [sic], doesn't gripe, gives it a hundred and fifty percent."

Phi Theta Kappa (the community college honor society) was also highlighted as one of the most significant positive experiences. Four of these students had been selected for Phi Theta Kappa, were involved in its community service requirements, and valued this recognition of their scholastic accomplishments.

Student Interactions

Students at BCC believed that responsible students helped one another, so that all could succeed. "It's our responsibility to share with other students . . . [If you] help somebody else to achieve . . . then they're going to help them [others] to get ahead." This belief in mutual assistance often led to the organization of informal study groups. The groups met in school facilities or at the organizer's home; in addition some students also "met" by phone. Group study support was seen as "the only way to survive." Groups functioned to help these adults learn or understand material which they did not fully grasp. Group interaction also extended understanding and revealed alternative perspectives of the material. Finally, these groups also offered personal and social interaction. "[Study group] is the most enjoyable part of my learning experience . . . you're meeting new people." Of the 15 participants, 12 reported studying with others in at least one class during the semester of the interview, even though such activity was not a course requirement.

Faculty Helpfulness

Help was also received from instructors. Those faculty who were knowledgeable, well-organized, and effective communicators were highly valued. Most of these students specifically judged instructors based on their ability to communicate course content in terms students could understand. Instructors were helpful by being accessible during and after class to answer questions, by providing repetition during instruction, and by communicating at a "student's level of understanding." These adults felt an instructor's major goal should be to create a situation that supported success in their learning. The metaphors of push and pull were used to describe helpful instructor actions: "He pulled more out of students" or "She really gave me the push that I needed . . . the courage to think that I could do it." The majority of participants complimented Bayville instructors for "going the extra mile" to help them learn and for caring about the student as a person. Key aspects of such care included promoting the adult student's sense of dignity and self-esteem and establishing some type of personal connection through attitudes that communicated willingness to help and to be accessible. In addition, good instructors "would be flexible enough that if it wasn't working [they] would listen to the students and try something else that would work better."

Perceptions of Age Differences

College attendance as an adult caused these participants to make comparisons between themselves and their younger student peers. Most of the adult students valued an age-integrated class. They noted the brilliance, their energy and youthfulness of many younger students. Initially some adult students felt intimidated by the younger students, because they were bright and had current knowledge from high school. For some, there was a sense of social discomfort because of their age; however this feeling decreased in intensity with time and with the presence of other adult students (often in evening classes). Many believed younger students had clear academic advantages. However, they discovered that with effort they also could do well in classes. The tables turned when some younger students seemed intimidated by the adults because of their maturity and desire to excel in class.

Adult students also voiced a strong belief and concern that many younger students lacked commitment and were unfocused. Phrases like "killing time" and "just getting by" were often used to describe younger adults' non-involvement in the classroom. Adults noted that the less committed younger students most often sat in the back of the class and were disruptive to the instructor and the class. "They'll make noises or grunt . . . they were rude."

These adults saw themselves as more focused, conscientious, and committed because they were paying their own tuition and making sacrifices to be in a college classroom. "I am driven more to success than I would have been twenty years ago, because I know the ramifications and the implications of my actions." There was a sense of privilege these adults associated with their college attendance: "I feel as though the adult student appreciates it more. They work harder to get what they didn't get earlier. They know . . . the value of what they missed."

Learning and Performance

Many adult students commented that their major student difficulty was their ability to study and get good grades. Some believed that their age influenced their performance: "At my age it is hard to memorize. I keep thinking something's gotta come out [of my brain] for more input to come in. It's full! Overloaded!" Another commented, ". . . if a younger student can get it in two hours, it probably takes me four. Because, first of all, I've been out of the system so long that the prerequisites I had to start with are not only forty years old, but they're way, way back on the edge of recall." These adults usually focused upon the insufficient time to study, struggling to master a difficult subject, the need to be constantly "on the go" in order to avoid falling behind in a class, and a sense of being "deluged" with information with "so much to learn."

These students spoke to a life immersed in classroom and study time. The time commitment was much more than "seat time." Participants were deeply engaged in making sense of the material through application, repetition, and reinforcement to enhance retention. "I don't consider myself very smart. I slog. I just go over and over and over it." Grades for these individuals had a special meaning. For some there was a direct equation between grades and the amount of time and effort they expended in study. Some students viewed grades as a piece of information used by employers or other authorities to judge them, which led to a feeling of competition about grades. Some reported that initially grades were linked to their self-esteem. With experience and perspective, these adults often reported a greater concern for the value of learning, rather than the focus on grades.

Learning and Life Connections

Many viewed learning from a broader life-view connected to their adult life roles. The life experiences these adults brought to the classroom often served as starting points for class discussions and made it "easier . . . to understand what the instructor is already saying." Some noted the distinction between book knowledge and practical knowledge and their valuing of both. One such adult learner portrayed himself as "looking down the road" in a course by studying certain aspects of the subject matter which applied at work, as well as the material needed to pass a test. Others judged class content and learning context in light of the experience of living: "I think I have got more life experiences than [younger students]. I tend to take everything with a grain of salt, because I know what we're learning in school is book learning. It's not practical application outside the classroom. Some of the instructors tend to forget that. And younger students take it verbatim."

These students valued general education courses because they enhanced their self-understanding and their grasp of their own place in the world. One student recognized his own religious upbringing after studying the Puritans. Another commented that after taking a history class, "I can read a newspaper now. It's a big thing. [Before] . . . I didn't know how to relate to it." Many made comments similar to one who said, "I realize that every semester, I find myself just feeling more in touch with my world and the people in it." Two participants talked about the "progression" of classroom knowledge. One said, "Now that I've had calculus, I think I understand algebra a lot better. Or when I took algebra, I think I understood . . . some of the basic math a little bit better."

As a result of their experiences as students, these adults often reported internal changes in perspective. Exposure to "required" courses revealed alternative viewpoints that made them less judgmental of themselves and others. Different classroom management techniques helped one student to see that it was all right to do things in different ways. Another learned how to set short- and long-term goals for the first time in adult life and found the experience of meeting these goals emotionally rewarding. Yet another thought that "you had to be really smart to learn all these things" but now feels, "It's up to me to learn."

Classroom Environment

Study participants viewed physical location in the classroom as a reflection of commitment and ease in the learning process. They usually sat in the front of the classroom in order to focus, see and hear effectively, have fewer distractions, watch the instructor, and listen. Many of these students had "personal theories" about their selection of seating. For example, "Better students always sit up front. . . . It's a proven fact." " As you progress from back to front in the classroom,. . . it gets a little older and older . . . as it moves up to the front," with the oldest students in the front of the classroom. Sitting in front was a way of establishing a more personal relationship between themselves, the class experience, and the instructor who was judge of the student's effort and commitment to the class.

Most adult students believed that instructors responded to adult students differently. They saw the classroom environment reflecting a faculty-adult student interaction. Many reported that faculty often noted, "[Adults are] there because they want to be. They're [the faculty are] glad that they can teach to someone who wants to learn." Curiously, these adult students also felt their age influenced instructors' views. "I think they expect more out of an older student . . . to already know all."

In summary, these adult undergraduates were a unique and diverse group. For some adult students, the student role was central and had a profound influence on their lives. For other students, Bayville provided a low-cost, accessible, and supportive environment while they continued major work and family roles. This group suggests the community college has a significant influence and impact on lower-division adult undergraduates.

Appendix C

CHARLES COLLEGE[1]

Evening Adult Degree Program in a Liberal Arts College

Founded in 1857 as a women's institute and renamed Charles College in 1914, this institution has a long tradition of church-affiliated, women's collegiate education. In recent years, Charles has become a co-educational liberal arts institution with select master's programs. Currently engaged in a self-renewal program, Charles College is striving to become a preeminent church-related, urban-based liberal arts college. Charles has three units, the Liberal Arts College with 800 undergraduates, the Adult Alternative College with 520 adult students, and the Graduate School with 300 students. While the Liberal Arts College serves a predominantly young, resident population during the day, the Adult Alternative College (AAC) was authorized in 1979 to provide evening undergraduate liberal arts degrees and professional programs grounded in the liberal arts. Undergraduate tuition for a three credit hour course is approximately $500.00.

Charles College is located in Edwardsville, one of the major cities in the state. It has a population of 400,000 and a surrounding service area of 1,200,400. Three major interstate highways transect the city. Charles College, the best known liberal arts college in the area, is conveniently located in an affluent residential area of the city. The surroundings reflect a traditional residential campus with classic red-brick, ivy-covered buildings, large trees, and common green areas.

The Adult Alternative College serves students who are primarily older, working adults. It features an admissions office and a service office that provides advisement, counseling, and advocacy on adult student concerns in the Charles academic community. Of the 520 adult students in AAC, approximately 10% are full-time students. Forty percent of AAC students are seeking a Bachelor of Arts degree in business, accounting, or computer information systems. Seventy (13%) are nursing majors; 10% are communications majors; 4% are in English; 6% are in psychology; the remainder are history or radiologic technology majors. AAC faculty includes full-time Charles College faculty and part-time adjunct faculty, many of whom have had a longiterm association with Charles. As of fall, 1992, adult students participating in the AAC represented 200 different Edwardsville employers. Of these employers, 60% to 70% have tuition reimbursement programs.

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[1] The names have been changed to provide anonymity.

Background to the Study

This qualitative multiple case study examined the experiences of adult undergraduates. Eighteen Adult Alternative College students who majored in business, accounting, or computer information systems were interviewed at Charles College. The sample of 8 men and 10 women ranged in ages from 32 to 48 with an average of 39. Fourteen were married, and four were divorced. Fifteen were Caucasian; two were African-American; and one was Asian. Sixteen were full-time employees, one was unemployed, and one was employed part-time. The majority held management-level positions and were either in upper-division academic work or had recently graduated. Participants selected Charles for its convenience, size, reputation, and atmosphere. They desired one of the available academic majors, as well as the experiences of a liberal arts institution.

The following descriptive summary of the study presents the key themes identified across the 18 interviews. This summary is presented in two parts. The first part describes the adult students' life experiences and actions as they became involved and progressed through the undergraduate adult degree program. The second part addresses the adults' experiences in the Charles classroom and the Adult Alternative College.

Part One: Adult Perceptions of Life that Includes College

Becoming a Student (Again)

There were a number of issues facing these adults as they entered or reentered an academic program. Fifteen of the 18 participants had prior experiences in the higher education system. One-half of the sample had previously attended a four-year institution, one-fourth had community college experience along with the four-year experience, and one-tenth had attended only a community college. Two brought a business school background, and one was a high school dropout.

While there were those who came to Charles for a specific major or a career-related credential, the dominant reason for entry was a desire to learn and grow. One adult expressed this common theme by saying, "There's no way to tell you the bounds to which someone's education can enhance their lives because they're insurmountable . . . You cannot put a boundary on what it gives you." For some, enrollment was the expression of an intent to complete a degree; others desired intellectual stimulation; and still others saw the degree as one step toward other life goals.

Making the decision to become a student was not an easy one. A participant commented that "If someone were to ask me who was thinking about doing it [going to school], I would probably tell them it's going to be one of the toughest decisions you'll ever make . . . ." For a majority, the decision to enroll at Charles was a function of immediate circumstances and life context, as well as a long-standing desire. The decision was influenced by the availability of tuition assistance programs, a job change or move to the area, divorce, remarriage, or a youngest child's school enrollment.

Time-Related Issues

These adults spoke to the difficulties of "juggling" and "balancing" their roles and responsibilities in life. The majority felt their work role was of highest priority. They were usually forced to limit time given to their family roles and personal needs; most often, personal and family time were sacrificed in order to maintain other roles. Some of the participants reported going for weeks at a time on four or five hours of daily sleep. One reported contending with a doubled work load that occurred as a result of an unexpected company buy-out. It was especially difficult when other commitments assumed equal importance with work, such as major difficulty with a child, a parent, or with one's own health. In such instances conflicting role demands were intensified.

School was often perceived as a source of conflict in students' lives. At the time of entry, all of the study participants had to readjust their life commitments. Three of the adults temporarily dropped one of their other major life roles to accommodate college involvement. Two became displaced workers and shifted from part-time student status to full-time. One left a part-time job to become a full-time student in order to finish the degree more quickly.

There were many personal concerns and feelings associated with multiple time demands. Some of the students expressed anger and resentment. One felt as if he was "under the gun" in class, unable to finish all the homework because of work demands. Others raised issue with spending time in irrelevant class and homework activities. Yet another felt a "gnawing" anxiety associated with trying to be prepared for class and also keeping up elsewhere in life. One adult expressed frustration after spending "hours" on a paper and receiving only a check mark from the professor. Some came to accept earning lower grades than they were capable of due to insufficient study time because of other life demands.

These students shared multiple and inventive ways to meet the demands of the student role. Study time was negotiated by taking advantage of every available opportunity. These students not only studied at home and in the library, but also in the car (while commuting), on the plane (during work-related travel), and during quick moments snatched from the work day. Some photocopied text pages and carried them with them in order to take advantage of such snippets of time. One wife studied her course assignments while "watching" (with earplugs) TV sports events with her husband.

Financial Issues

Over one-half of these students identified the expense of a Charles College education as an important issue for them. Thirty percent used employer tuition reimbursement as their sole source of financial support. Another 30% added personal funds to employer assistance; 15% used only personal funds; and 10% used two or more sources. Many made comments similar to one student who said, "I [feel] like it's too expensive for the few courses that I'm taking, but since my company is picking it up, I'm doing it. But if it were coming out of my pocket, I probably couldn't have continued." Many were also keenly concerned about the value of the education given the cost. "It's very expensive here. Sometimes I don't think I've gotten value for my money. I think there needs to be more accountability with that. I think if I'm going to pay this much or if the company is going to pay this much, I should be getting first-rate education." Several individuals were critical of courses and professors that, in their opinion, failed to deliver "top dollar" quality. Thus, these students critically judged the quality, importance, and relevancy of what they were learning in relation to their sense of satisfaction and value relative to the high tuition costs. A number commented on the lack of funding for the adult student in comparison with the traditional aged student. Only 10% of these adult undergraduates had grants or scholarships to assist them. Several noted their anger at the assumption that working adults can readily pay for further education and the further supposition that employers would support their undergraduate work.

Several of the adults mentioned the importance of Charles' tuition deferment program. This policy of deferring tuition until the end of the semester had enabled a number of students to manage school expenses. Many were greatly concerned over the changing tuition deferment policy and the rising costs at Charles, feeling that access to the Charles program was being limited for many. Several felt that they would probably have to transfer to other institutions because of the increasing expenses.

Advisement

For many of these students, the initial Adult Alternative College advising process was a significant positive experience. Negative experiences at previously attended institutions were typical for many. These students felt advising at Charles was unique in its quality and scope. They saw the AAC advisor as the major link between themselves and the institution. Helpful, accurate information was provided along with a road map for their program and personal support for those who felt anxious about starting this collegiate experience. The advisor knew the students well enough to be able to provide individualized advice, tailored to the student's personal academic needs.

Family and Work Supports

Family Influence

Spousal influence on college attendance was profound for these adults. Spouse assistance was described in 11 specific ways in the interviews. Many noted active support through verbal encouragement; this was often deeply appreciated by the adult undergraduate. It was viewed as a form of cheerleading in their quiet, often isolated journey. Spouses gave the most frequent verbal support, but others in the student's life also provided praise, including work colleagues and supervisors, parents, brothers and sisters, various in-laws, and friends.

Spouses and children were also called upon to offer more significant types of support for the adult student. These included "understanding," one aspect of which was not demanding time and attention the student was unable to give; adapting to the student's schedule; logistical support such as picking up the children; and solving problems which directly threatened progress toward the degree. Many spouses and children "made allowances," tolerating the intrusion of school into their lives. Spouses also took over responsibilities formerly done by the student in order to give the student "free" time to devote to class and study. A few reported spouses who "carried the whole load." Since there was little time left in the student's life for maintaining family relationships, the non-student spouse often operated essentially as a single parent in meeting children's needs. These adult students also spoke to other types of support such as understanding the necessity to live within the constraints of a limited budget imposed by college-related expenditures. A spouse and family also offered support by sharing the values. Education and the receipt of a bachelor's degree were highly esteemed.

Rarely did the participants perceive active opposition to their college attendance, but when they did, it was devastating. One described a spouse who threatened to leave if the student did not quit school during a previous period of enrollment. Two others described family members negative views. They were forced to become very determined and assertive. Occasionally, students also experienced subtle pressure through the disappointment of a spouse or child who wanted the student to participate in a family-related activity that conflicted with school or study time.

Support in the Work Setting

Within the work setting, the types of support were more limited but nonetheless vital. Beyond the importance of financial support from the employer, work supervisors played an active role in helping the worker-student. Helpful actions included giving work time for study to prepare for a test; running interference with others so the employee could study; drawing charts to explain class-related material; convincing upper management of the value of an educated employee; encouraging application for tuition assistance; agreeing to expose the employee to unfamiliar work-related tasks that would be helpful to school and learning; and not insisting that the student work late on projects when that would conflict with class attendance. Work colleagues who had been or were students themselves offered important support and perspective on both class content as well as the stresses of studenthood. Occasionally, there were negative reactions in the work setting; peers sometimes viewed the student as "uppity" or believed the student was making "unnecessary changes."

Adults' Judgments of the College Experience

These adult students valued their college experience. They valued the sheer pleasure and enjoyment associated with learning, as well as the reward of successfully meeting a challenge (either fitting the student role into life or completing a difficult course). A number of students reported enhanced self-esteem following instructor praise or when exceeding class requirements with a competent, worthy paper or project. Many valued their increased opportunities in life, the broader social networks developed through meeting interesting classmates, and newly acquired abilities they felt would allow them to make a contribution in the community and to other's lives. Several students also reported the unique value of being a positive role model for their children. However, there were also negatives associated with the collegiate experience. Many were distressed when other adult students appeared unconcerned about student responsibilities or educational participation. A few reported social discomfort in being an older student. Some focused upon their continual struggle to manage role conflicts; others reported intense personal sacrifice in order to attain the degree. Lastly, a few reported the belief that the bachelor's degree was now "societally" mandated. This perception made their enrollment essentially involuntary if they wished to survive in the work world. The bachelor's was also a "have-to" in order to pursue a graduate program. Those with this perception felt that "freedom" and enjoyment in education had shifted to the master's level.

For many of these adult learners, the undergraduate experience evolved into a concept of lifelong engagement in learning in the formal setting. Completing their bachelor's was not seen as an endpoint for 60% of the study sample who planned to obtain additional degrees. One felt that he would probably be involved in the formal classroom for "the rest of my life." Three of the participants had been seduced by the academy and saw themselves as going on for the doctorate and remaining in the academy through a professorial role.

Part Two:
Adult Perceptions of the Institution and the Classroom

Nature of the Institution

Charles College epitomized the aura of a typically small, prestigious private liberal arts college for most of the interviewed students. "When I first came to Charles I noticed that people said hello to you on the campus. There was a friendliness, a feeling here . . . . I like the small campus." They were attracted to Charles College because of its quality, adult-oriented academic environment which accommodated adult work and family responsibilities. "What I found here was that the whole atmosphere was created for people that couldn't attend school during traditional hours. And that was very comforting, that was very encouraging." The atmosphere reflected a personal and individualized learner/school relationship that supported adult involvement. They valued the availability of multiple-degree programs that could be completed through evening and occasional Saturday classes. More importantly, classes met one night a week, in contrast with other nearby colleges which required attendance twice a week. These adult learners valued smaller classes of 10 to 25 students which fostered personalized learning with faculty who often had experience in the work world. Several characterized the environment as academically challenging. One student called Charles College "major league" in comparison with another local college. "Academically I thought it was excellent. It was a great place to come after work. It was the great escape—to get away from work, to come here to study, to be with a group of people that had the same general goal . . . of bettering themselves, of learning something new, of being open-minded to things, of moving forward—that I thought was very exciting." Lastly, they valued the Adult Alternative College office and staff who provided personal support, advisement, and problem-resolution. "Moving through the pipeline . . . through admissions and then registration, and then taking the classes—I saw how well it works now. It was set up for that. It was easier for me to stay involved.... There was that sort of unspoken bond . . .We're all in this together [students, faculty, administrators]."

One theme in the interviews was the issue surrounding connectedness and friendships with fellow adult students. Perhaps due to Charles' small, private, liberal arts tradition or to the nature of an adult student population within an adult collegiate context, one-fourth of the group noted the development of significant friendships; "this is the biggest part of my social life because you spend so much time here." Within this group, there were two participants who were actively engaged in Student Government and viewed that role as part of a true student collegiate experience. Another fourth of the group noted a profound sadness due to failure to develop such friendships. "When I did come here . . . I started to realize . . . that a lot of these expectations of being a real close knit group of friends and colleagues that you would have, didn't happen. And I was disappointed." Approximately 40% of the students reported that they didn't have time to develop friendships on campus nor did they view the college as a "social outlet." The latter desired quality courses and viewed the college experience solely within the confines of the classroom.

Although the study participants valued Charles College and the special emphasis and access of AAC, they felt three academic areas needed change. First, many desired a specialized orientation program for entering adult students that would provide (a) social connections with other students during the entry period, (b) knowledge about Charles and the campus, (c) the opportunity to meet a variety of faculty/staff advisors, and (d) a workshop focused on study skill development and time management. Second, they felt that adult students at Charles needed more recognition. One noted, "...there was no valedictorian for Adult Alternative College . . . [I want] some of the pomp and circumstance type stuff that goes around college and achievements and those type of things." Finally, classroom furnishings were problematic. Many raised issue with small chairs and desks for accounting classes and with uncomfortable adult seating in the classrooms.

The Classroom Experience

The Adult Learner Context

The AAC classroom reflected a number of valued assets. These adult undergraduates felt that faculty and staff respected adult students, understood the adult life, valued the experiences and perspectives of adults, and were available and accessible to adult students. In contrast with the younger students, "Most professors here at Charles treat nighttime adult students with some type of respect. They're more interested in what we [adult students] have to say as far as making a point and then, they also trust us differently as far as attendance. They're more flexible with us . . . because they know that we're there for real learning. They know we're there for a purpose and not just because [of] mom and dad."

Features of this adult-oriented classroom included stimulating discussion, valuable course readings, well-organized content, and assignments that were due at predictable times. They valued a knowledgeable professor who was competent in the classroom and also valued faculty who held work roles in the community. Teacher competence included the ability to engage students in activities that led to understanding of the material, "making it real," bringing in "real-life situations" and connecting content to adult levels of understanding (in contrast to young students' level of understanding). Finally, proficient professors went beyond "administering the time and reciting text." Several students felt strongly that faculty should welcome and actively seek discussion, because this was a means of giving the students "their money's worth." About 25% of the students reported their preference for remaining quiet in class and not engaging in discussion. Another 25% noted that they served as intermediaries between peers and the professor in order to stimulate discussion. They asked questions to clarify a classmate's misunderstanding of material, to break a long lecture segment, or to compare class examples with other knowledge.

Adult Alternative College students valued students who had an open mind, actively thought and sought to understand the material, participated in classroom discussions and prepared for class. These students believed it was important to provide feedback to teachers about their (the adult students') comprehension and understanding of the material. They often engaged in classroom learning through reflection and meta-cognitive activities. Many believed that students needed to be self-disciplined and self-initiating, as well as personally responsible for "getting the material."

These adults valued an adult majority in the classroom. They felt adults were more seriously invested in learning and that an adult ambiance led to more significant learning. However, they also appreciated the presence of some younger undergraduates. "The younger students are more vibrant and more alert . . . more energetic." These adults favored younger student representation in the adult classroom environment because the adult students gained an understanding of the younger generation and a broader perspective since "[younger students] look at things differently than we do." Many disliked day classrooms dominated by younger students because the professor "babied" and "spoon-fed" students. These adults felt that traditional students: (a) were in college due to external pressures; (b) viewed college primarily as a social enterprise rather than a learning one; and (c) constrained the professor in creating an adult learning environment in order to accommodate younger students' lack of life experience. Professors in the traditional classroom had to deal with student behavior problems and were focused on creating classroom structures to prod learning, such as "busywork" assignments and frequent testing.

Mastering the Material

In describing how these adults learned the material through class and study, there appeared to be two groups with different perspectives. There were a number of students who came to the classroom with prior academic knowledge or with work/life experiences in the application of the content. Work (and life) experience was seen as the *basis* for learning. The second group of students spoke of dealing with material that was new to them or very difficult to learn, such as math. The latter group created serious study strategies to learn new and at times "meaningless content."

This first group suggests an existing knowledge base that could incorporate and easily assimilate new content. A number of these students also reported learning at a theoretical level. "You have guidelines [rules and procedures] which you learn . . . [as opposed to rote memorization]." However, when these adults were in a class where the subject matter was known or familiar to them from their work life, they also experienced a downside. They were frustrated when the textbook or faculty (without work knowledge) provided examples that were seen as irrelevant or inaccurate.

The second group (without prior knowledge) noted specific strategies and routines they used to learn and retain the material such as focused reading, outlining texts, detailed note taking in class, completion of all homework, regular review of notes and text highlighting. "You just have to really concentrate. And I think doing the homework helps me to remember it, because as you're doing it, you're learning it.... It actually helps to practice it." These students also found feedback on assignments very helpful.

These two groupings were also evident in the discussions of studying for tests. The first group did not view studying for a test as a major time commitment. "I never go back to that stuff after I've organized it . . . . A lot of times I don't even study for a test." On the other hand, the second group would report, "When I study for the exam, I gather all of this together. I start from the beginning . . . get my notes, and so forth, and I will review the notes and the text . . . I will work through the study guide. Sometimes I just have to maybe go over the homework problems or the text and try to clarify and strengthen understanding on the weaknesses that I've had."

Linking Academic and Practical Knowledge

Most of the students connected their classroom learning in a variety of ways to their work and family lives. Some had done work assignments in the past without fully understanding it. In the classroom they discovered the meaning and relatedness of those business actions to course content and to business operations in the broad sense. "Some of the things you're learning you've already been using and they make completely more sense than the first time around [as a young adult]." When there was active interrelating of the classroom and the work environment, these adults commented that they were able to retain the course material over the long haul. On the other hand, if they had little interest in the subject matter and could not make any connections with the work environment or their personal life, the course became a short haul course and little of the subject matter was retained. Some of these adult undergraduates talked about the professor's influence in linking the classroom and the "real" world. These conversations often focused upon such courses as physics, religion, and history, which did not bear direct connection to work life. Participants preferred and sought meaningful learning in contrast to settling for memorization and repetition of "facts and figures." A work situation could prime the learning pump and actively facilitate classroom learning. There also appeared to be a reciprocal relationship in that these adults were mentally more open and alert to learning in the work environment as a result of being in the classroom. This reciprocal relationship appeared to be one expression of a holistic knowledge transfer between the classroom and work/personal lives. Numerous students talked about this as a "broadened world view" and commented on the addictive nature of learning in that the more one learns, the more there is to learn in all facets of life.

Students who had work experience directly related to course content spoke of using different learning techniques as opposed to the techniques used when the content was unfamiliar. They spoke of "making sense of the lecture" through a reliance on listening and occasional questioning. With limited note-taking, they focused on understanding and making meaningful connections between their understandings and the content when studying. "You relate it to real life things. And it's been helpful to me that I do it during the day [during work] to relate it to my school work." Several of these adults reported consulting with work colleagues to clarify content or to enhance meaning, instead of going to the professor. "People literally stop what they are doing and want to help you.... They can say the magic words that bring things together all of a sudden. . . . I actually understand relationships and how things are built upon each other and it's real important to me." On occasion, these informed work colleagues had trouble answering the learner's question and both became involved in tracking down a solution. Work resources were often used to help master course material. Printed resources available in the work setting were used to supplement the text and class notes. Projects required for work were sometimes used to satisfy a course assignment. Such "double duty" activities were highly valued by these working students.

While application of content to the work setting was the dominant theme for the majority of these adults, they also mentioned the impact of course learning in their personal lives. "I always tend to turn back to my personal life and see how I could use this information." One student commented further that "good" students were able to recognize opportunities in the classroom for sharing relevant personal experiences; and "good" professors actively drew out students in order to reveal their pertinent personal knowledge of the subject matter.

Student Perspectives of Classroom Evaluation

Study participants expressed different beliefs about the value of evaluation and testing. One group felt testing was needed and valued it. They thought testing focused their studying, provided feedback on the accuracy of their understanding, validated student knowledge of the content, and measured learning and retention. "It's a measure; it dictates to the student how far you will get with [the] education that you are obtaining. In the real world, the employer will want to know how you performed—were you just one of those students who got by? It reflects everything—your earning power, your performance, how well you mingle with the other intellectual people." A number of students linked successful performance on tests and high grades with an interior sense of success. "It makes you either feel good about yourself or realize that you [didn't] study enough . . . It shows you where your problems are."

Approximately half of the students did not value testing and expressed resentment over testing and the grading of homework. Most of this group felt that such evaluation was irrelevant to their knowledge base; others felt that testing was intended to trick them. "I resent being tested on picky things. I see this as a great waste of my time—to be tested on spitting out the exact journal entries."

Many of the study participants felt that the most acceptable grade was an "A." They reported a determination to have nothing less during their student career at Charles. "The way I was brought up, you made A's." In this vein, several perceived the adult classroom as a competitive and grade-conscious environment "You're competing for a grade with the other people that are in there . . . and they are good at homework and they read all the assignments and they never miss class." As these adults continued to take courses, many maintained a focus on obtaining a 4.0 GPA while others shifted their objective. Many came to recognize that the grade did not automatically equate with the degree of subject mastery. However, students who were inclined to accept grades below the A level faced several dilemmas. In some cases a high GPA was viewed as compensation for poor grades during their young adult years. Often, employer tuition reimbursement led to a grade focus when it was tied to the grade (100% for an A, 75% for a B, and so forth). This also created economic pressure. Some adults were grade-conscious because of graduate school admissions. Lastly, many of these adults were high achievers and believed that grades did reflect a sense of competency in life.

This case study of Charles College adult undergraduates illustrates the unique context of an adult degree program and the views of adults who are pursuing a college degree for their own development and commitment to lifelong learning, as well as for a credential and knowledge expertise.

Appendix D

DELTA UNIVERSITY[1]

Undergraduate Programs at a Public University

Delta University began in 1946 as an extension site for returning veterans, and has evolved through several forms to its present authorization as a public university and member of the state system in 1965. Delta University currently enrolls 15,400 students (13,100 undergraduates and 2,300 graduate students) across six colleges and the Graduate School. The University offers 70 undergraduate majors, 40 master's degree programs, and, in cooperation with two other state universities, select doctoral degrees. The majority of courses are offered at the main campus, located in the northern part of the city. The University currently enrolls approximately 2,800 students who are 25 years of age or older in undergraduate programs. Undergraduate tuition for a three-credit-hour course is approximately $120 (in-state) and $686 (out-of-state).

Delta University is located in Edwardsville, a major city for the state with a population of approximately 400,000 and a surrounding service area of 1,200,400. This urban campus features contemporary buildings, a quadrangle with a carillon, and convenient access to three major interstate highways. Approximately 50% of Delta's undergraduate students live on or adjacent to campus. The school has made a major commitment to collaborative development of a research park to stimulate links with high tech companies and regional business and industry.

In 1989, the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs created an Office for Nontraditional Student Services to assist the adult student population. In a recent study of enrolled adult undergraduates, this office found that 65% of the adult undergraduate population was 25-35 years of age and 61% were women. Eighty-three percent were white; 10% were African-American; and 36% were full-time students. Currently, all seven majors in the College of Business Administration and four majors (Psychology, Political Science, Sociology, and English) in the College of Arts and Sciences are available in an evening format. The remaining academic majors may offer select courses at night, but degree completion requires day-time access. In the study, 52% of adult undergraduates were enrolled in evening classes, 41% in day classes, and the remainder were enrolled in both day and evening courses.

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[1] All names have been changed to provide anonymity.

Background to the Study

In this qualitative multiple-case study, the experiences of adult undergraduates were explored. Ten adults, age 30 or older, were interviewed on the Delta University campus. The sample consisted of five men and five women ranging in age from 32 to 47 with an average age of 38. Seven were married, two were single, separated or divorced, and one gave no response. Seven were Caucasian; one was Afro-American; one was Hispanic, and one gave no response. Three were full-time students. Two students were employed full-time, and six were employed part-time. The majority had been students at Delta for a number of years. Approximately three of the participants were in lower-division course work; the remainder were in upper-division course work. Nine different academic majors were represented.

The following descriptive summary identifies the key themes from the ten interviews. The first portion of the summary deals with the personal experiences and views of these adults as they impacted their decision to become a student and to maintain that role. The second section presents the views of these adults regarding the Delta classroom and campus.

Part One: Adult Perceptions of Life that Includes College

Past Collegiate Experience

For the most part, study participants spent the majority of their young adult years focused on concerns other than education, even though most had at least brief experiences in post-secondary institutions. Eight of the ten spoke of previous episodes of college attendance as isolated activities typically occurring in response to the expectations of family members. One mentioned the baccalaureate degree as a personal goal during these earlier years. These prior involvements were very diverse. Four had attended four-year institutions; four had taken courses at a community college; and two had no previous higher education experience prior to enrolling at Delta. Many of those with previous experience at four-year schools had also attended community colleges as part of their episodic involvement in higher education. Seven of the Delta sample had attended two-year community colleges; two earned an associate's degree prior to attending Delta. All the participants felt that anything less than the bachelor's was unacceptable as an initial higher education credential. Three had specific plans for further study at the master's level; three had "thought about" graduate work; three felt the bachelor's would "be enough"; the future educational plans of one participant were unknown.

Value of a Degree

These adults were enrolled at Delta for a variety of reasons. In contrast to their relative lack of involvement in higher education as young adults, the study participants now made their academic experience a priority in their lives. Concern for their livelihood influenced the decision to attend college for most of these adults. They expected the benefits of a college education to increase their employment options and to allow them access to meaningful and rewarding work. None spoke of a degree in light of a specific position or employer. Five expected to leave current employment or to alter their current occupation once they obtained the degree. Three others who wanted to enter the teaching profession needed educational credentials for employment. The remaining two had no specific work-related plans associated with degree attainment; although they did not rule out its potential benefit. Instead, they focused primarily on the internal satisfaction they associated with college attendance. One commented, "I'm my own person. I've got these ideas and interests aside from family too. And I really need that part before I lose myself as a person." However, even among the participants who placed heavy emphasis on livelihood, the effects of a degree on the ideas of personal satisfaction, knowledge attainment, and a sense of accomplishment were also important. One stated, "I... decided I'd just go back. . . . It wasn't anyone pushing or someone trying to say, 'Well, if you do this I'll do that.' It wasn't any of that. It was just because I wanted to go."

Becoming a Student

Entering a university can be a daunting experience. Several of the study participants expressed initial concerns about their ability to meet academic standards and to be successful in achieving their own performance goals. All of these spoke of adapting relatively quickly to their student role and of their pleasure at discovering their academic abilities. Several noted the positive impact of making good grades and being on the Dean's List. This feedback helped them believe that they could succeed and truly be a part of a university environment.

Most of these adults did not report a sense of pressure to "give up" particular activities in order to be a student. Instead, there was a sense of the voluntary substitution of the student role for another previously held adult role, or the willingness to put energy and time into a student role in lieu of other obligations and roles. Few reported significant conflicts between the student role and their involvements in work or family life. However, those that reported serious conflicts led highly stressful and delicately balanced multi-role lives.

A majority of these adult undergraduates had rearranged their lives in order to focus on school. Approximately one-third of the group were full-time students fully involved on campus both in and outside the classroom. Two had voluntarily left full-time employment, and one was a displaced worker. As an example of this involvement, one spoke of seeking to feel "at home" at Delta by spending the entire day on campus either in classes, at the library, or at the University Center. In addition, deliberate efforts were made to establish on-campus friendships and relationships that strengthened ties with the university. These full-time students often compared school to a "job"; they defined their involvement by carefully allocating time to class, study, and campus tasks. They spoke of applying already mastered work place skills in the academic setting, feeling that their previous work and life skills were an asset in adjusting to college life and in developing relationships in a university setting. One mentioned spending more time in studying and classes than on a previous full-time job.

A second group of adults described a continuous negotiation between student, work, and other roles. Three managed the student role by adjusting work hours in order to attend classes in their desired major during the day. Two became part-time workers; one negotiated full-time work hours each semester according to class meeting time. The remaining members of the sample fit the student role into their lives by taking one or at most two courses per semester. For this latter group, the dominant concern was family or work; the student role was more limited. These adults had been part-time students for four to ten years. Many of these adults had come to terms with the time and energy requirements of the student role; college was secondary to their adult roles, but an important life activity.

In the main, the participants attended day classes rather than evening. Day attendance was necessary because classes required for the desired degree were not offered in the evening, or because evening class meeting times (two nights a week) interfered with normal routines more than daytime attendance. A few also noted that daytime attendance made it possible to carry more hours per semester than evening attendance. One participant preferred day classes over evening classes, feeling that the evening classes were less rigorous and that the evening adjunct faculty were not as well-qualified as faculty who taught during the day.

The Impact of College Attendance

These adults found that they needed many resources to support them as they entered and continued in the student role. In addition, they had to make changes in their other adult roles.

Family and Community Involvement

These adults often integrated the student role into their lives by creating meaningful connections between family members and student activities. Some involved family members, both children and spouses, in the activity of studying. Several told of teaching a spouse or child some aspect of the course content. They also mentioned having other family members quiz them for tests and discussing the course content together. Bringing family members to campus to show them where Mom or Dad attended classes was another integration strategy. They felt this campus visit helped family members understand the student role. One male student switched roles with a spouse, taking on the household responsibilities and child care in order to attend as a full-time student; his spouse provided the primary financial support.

These adults also managed to maintain their involvement in the community. A number maintained church attendance and volunteer work with Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. One was very involved with community based self-help groups; others were grade parents, PTA committee members, or coaches for children's sport activities.

Financial Issues

Financing their college education was an issue for the majority of these adult undergraduates and a serious difficulty for some. Four used a single source to pay for school; four used two sources; two used three or more. The two most common sources were personal earnings and spousal support, followed by savings, loans, and employer assistance. Only one participant had benefitted from a scholarship.

A second felt a scholarship had been denied on the basis of age discrimination. A number of these adults would have preferred the option of being a full-time student, but could see no way to do this and still survive financially.

Time-Related Issues

Fitting student-related tasks into their lives required careful and even meticulous planning for these adults. There was no leisure time left in their lives. They were particularly frustrated when their efforts at time management were compromised. This occurred when required courses were offered at times that conflicted with other responsibilities, and when school-related activities such as registration and book purchases required excessive time. A dilemma also occurred when they were required to balance deadlines for simultaneous tests or assignments or when a required field trip impacted their non-class hours and other adult commitments. The time required to commute to classes was a frustration for at least two of the participants.

Full-time students reported spending 30 to 40 hours or more in study on a weekly basis. Two adults reported that the only study time available to them, given their heavy work and family responsibilities, was from 3:00 to 5:00 AM. For one of these, the time needed to perform well as a student simply couldn't be found; thus there was a struggle to survive "by the skin of my teeth."

Interpersonal Relationships

In order to sustain involvement as adult students, the participants saw the support of others in their lives as vital. Beyond spousal financial support, these students valued the verbal encouragement and support spouses offered. A valued spouse "doesn't question" time used in a student role, "take(s) up the slack," provides tolerance for the "fallout" a student expresses at test times, or shows an interest in course ideas and information. When spouses did not provide the needed support, a close friend was most often cited as critical in keeping the student going. Family members, friends, and work colleagues who were most supportive were typically those who were or had been students themselves.

Benefits of Being a Student

This group of adults found that the advantages associated with the student role outweighed the difficulties. Phrases used to describe their experience included, "I don't want to stop"; "I like everything about it"; and "I think it's interesting to be around other people who have this goal in their life." Several noted the value of academic life by comparing it to work experiences. They noted that the pressures at school, while intense, were relatively short-lived and "you don't have to suffer forever." Work pressures often were continuous. As a student, success was assured once the "rules" were known and mastered, while in the ever-changing work world, the rules of success were constantly shifting. The joy of learning helped to mitigate the stress of school; however, a similar source of pleasure was seldom present at work.

There were many specific benefits realized from college attendance according to the study participants. One commented that it was refreshing to associate with those outside one's long-term field of employment. Another enjoyed the "quiet, orderly environment" of school and "listening to someone talk about something interesting." Further, "It's a life saver for my brain." Others spoke of having "new horizons" opened, of acquiring and using new knowledge, and of seeing "improvement in my thought processes." Yet another saw the "educational level" of the bachelor's as allowing her to give something back to society. Even taking required courses that were "distasteful" was perceived as a positive experience because participants regarded success in such courses as a real accomplishment. This led to more "internal confidence" and reinforcing their knowledge of the educational system and ability to negotiate within the system.

Part Two:
Adult Perceptions of the Institution and the Classroom

Nature of the Institution

Perception of Institution

Delta University was perceived by the students as a public university which offered a quality education, a complexity of curricula and activities, and an academically competitive and challenging experience. These students valued its more reasonable tuition and its offering of specialized academic programs. They had a certain belief about "going to college," suggesting that their own worth and educational experiences were enhanced by participation in a university environment, as opposed to other collegiate options. "I know this sounds terrible, but I don't think I would have felt as though I was going to college if I had gone to [community college] . . . I felt like just getting here was an accomplishment in itself." However, for others, their choice of Delta was more pragmatic. Some were careful to explain that there was nothing wrong with other types of schools but that, for them, Delta was the only choice. The choice of three individuals had been influenced by past acquaintances or friendships with faculty and administration; one desired Delta as an alma mater because the school had been "adopted" through past involvement in the institution's intercollegiate athletic foundation.

Perception of Involvement with Institution

These students held a differentiated perspective of their relationship to and involvement with the institution. Many of these students came with a desire for specialized curricula rather than a desire for a unique institutional experience. In fact, several of the participants who had relocated from other parts of the country for personal reasons had considered Delta's diversity an important factor in the decision-making process. No one spoke to any particular beliefs about the specific character of the university. Their predominant concern was a quality education.

They also noted another plane of involvement based upon their interaction with a complex university system with varied offices and a maze of policies and regulations. Most of these students expected a formal university/student link.

They did not necessarily expect to "fit in" and were willing to make adjustments to the norms of the institutional life. Many noted anxiety, insecurity, and feeling "out of place" as they entered the environment and made these adjustments to the institution. "Finding the class . . . I had my map, looking where is what and [feeling] like I was a complete idiot in the middle of the campus . . . Everybody else seemed to know their way. I was just a dummy, . . . sticking out because I was a much rarer object . . . I found less students my age here . . . therefore I was real insecure."

As they faced this adjustment to a complex university environment, they noted a number of key issues. Two of these adults faced initial problems with admissions because of their previous academic background. In both cases, the Admissions Office was valued for its supportive advisement and special admissions review process. Others found it difficult to deal with parking, lengthy and time-consuming registration procedures, changing majors and the evaluation of previous collegiate course work. The institutional bureaucracy was sometimes described as insensitive and incompetent. "I think they're one screwed-up organization. I think their administration is pitiful." However, most felt that one should expect these problems with a university. Thus, they blamed the complexity of the bureaucracy and noted the state's budget cutbacks, believing they couldn't expect normal services and sufficient courses. These adults dealt with the bureaucracy assertively. "If they say . . . something cannot be done, after a while, if you are aware, you find out things can be done." Personal appeals were a common avenue in rectifying problematic situations. Many also created monitoring and validation systems to prevent erroneous information from delaying their progress towards graduation.

Many felt that the institution did not understand the nature of adult students. "I think the administration needs to understand that those of us who are older than the others probably are under a lot more time constraints than the younger ones." Such difficulties were often related to access to and scheduling of courses. Many noted insufficient evening class offerings and inconvenient class schedules which required their presence on campus two or three days a week. As adults they also raised issue with a variety of letters and materials from the university which were addressed to "the parents of [themselves]." These written materials emphasized the institution's assumption that all undergraduates were young, under the supervision of a parent, and possessed unlimited daytime hours to deal with institutional problems. There seemed to be no recognition that these students were adults with adult responsibilities. Some objected to a lack of day-care, desired a customized adult curriculum, needed information on financial aid for adults, and would have liked extension courses closer to their homes.

Several had benefitted from contact with the Nontraditional Student Services Office. "I think I'm lucky because they had already set up an office that's nontraditional student services. That was really nice . . . 'cause you're [a] little scared because it's all young people." These individuals valued the special adult student orientation. One noted the personal assistance in "navigating through the sea of forms and all the things I'm not used to" when a family crisis precipitated withdrawal.

The Classroom Experience

The Adult Learner Context

It was evident that these adult learners, with or without previous higher education experience, were concerned about their involvement in a young adult, academically competitive setting. Initially they often scouted out the classroom to identify other adults of similar age and circumstances. "At first you go in and you see a lot of . . . age differences . . . . But there was [sic] several other students that were a lot . . . grayer than I am or with receding hair lines." Secondly, many were concerned about their ability to perform. "You have to prove to yourself that you can [be successful as a student]." For some, the first tests and papers were very important indicators; for others, the nontraditional student orientation program provided information about adult student success and alleviated their anxieties.

After participating in classes, completing tests and receiving grades, most of these adults felt more at ease. In particular, they reported developing increased understanding of their ability to succeed as a student. Several reported awareness of the different signals implicitly directed to different subgroups of the student population. "It was very frightening in the beginning . . . when the teacher begins the very first lecture and tells you this is a high risk class . . . and we had better study . . . and understand everything. . . . But you learn very quickly as an adult, that is really not meant for you, but for the rest of them." Most felt that faculty were supportive, especially when the "teacher takes me more seriously than the rest" or when faculty communicated a feeling that adult students were the better students in the classroom. The adult students also reported being respected and valued by the younger students.

The Key Connection: The Faculty

For these adults, the faculty instructor was the vital link between themselves as learners and the collegiate experience. Many characterized the faculty member as the leader. "They are the one that is going to lead the class. They are the one that you have to develop some kind of a bond with; you have to adjust to them; . . . they certainly don't have to adjust to you." Thus, these adults believed that the ground of collegiate success was between themselves, the faculty, and their learning experiences. They valued faculty who had instructional organization and good delivery, recognizing that each faculty member was unique in his/her presentation of content and in involvement of students in the learning process.

These students placed an equal emphasis on their own learning actions and on the faculty's broad direction in instruction. Study participants valued faculty who "bring it to you alive . . . not just out of the book. [They] . . . connect the theory with practice." Students approved of faculty who provided "open-ended ideas," thus allowing students to explore beyond the classroom and learn on their own. Such comments most often referred to non-science and non-technology classes. Such courses challenged these students to learn more on their own and to expand on their sense of meaning and understanding. However, courses in mathematics, sciences, and engineering were judged and valued from a different perspective.

Most believed that didactic instruction and the text were often insufficient for understanding and that learning in these areas was often presented as a rather cut and dried process. For them, such learning was not automatic, however, without help in the classroom. One exemplary teacher in chemistry "translates the material in the book on the blackboard so we can understand it . . . [the books] just give you a formula and they give you a problem and they won't show you how to do the problem."

These adults attempted to forge a bond, a personal connection with the faculty. "If they [professors] get to know you and they know you're older, I think they show you . . . a little more respect." "I try to get a one-to-one relationship with my instructors." Participants wanted to be known to the instructor as an individual and to establish an "adult-to-adult" relationship.

This adult student/faculty connection was student-initiated through interacting during class time and, if possible, during office hours. Communication initially centered on course-related questions, or clarifying content, but often moved to a mutual sharing of information about each one's individuality. Adult students attempted to communicate their commitment and dedication to the faculty member. This adult student/faculty connection was reflected in class through a more focused mental involvement and, for many, a class role as active discussant. Some felt that if they were understood as individuals in the student/faculty relationship, they would receive acceptance and support in their student role, particularly when adult life circumstances impacted their involvement in learning. In addition, these adults believed that this relationship aided them as faculty evaluated their student performance. Others believed that if they understood each faculty member's uniqueness, they could better act in concert with the faculty member to learn and to complete assignments in a way that was congruent with the faculty member's perceptions. "If you sell yourself a little bit, it doesn't hurt on papers. . . . It also not only lets them know who you are, but it lets you know maybe a little more what they are like so you can tailor or whatever their way." Lastly, this connection was perceived as a validation of the appropriateness and worth of an adult engaged in learning in a predominantly youth-focused setting.

Because of the significance of this connection, adult students were critical of faculty who did not make the connection. They disliked faculty who were inconsiderate, insensitive, condescending, intimidating, and sexist towards female students. "She made it perfectly understood that I should have done this [gone to school] 20 years ago."

Self-Informed and Involved Learners

These adult undergraduates viewed themselves as highly involved in the learning experience, noting the importance of serious concentration, focus, and dedication. Some suggested that education was not memorizing content, but that "education will give you the tools in order to find the information that you need"; thus traditional courses and grading were irrelevant. Most viewed grading as important for measuring their attainment in relation to others and as a means of recognizing achievement. Although they recognized that society needed grading to categorize or sort, most did not believe that grades accurately measured knowledge or learning.

Important learning for these adults was related to relevancy and interest. Such learning connected personal insights with meaningful experiences, or fostered application and problem-solving. Many of these students noted that their general education courses created an open-mindedness. As one student reported, "When I took that [biology] I was amazed . . . every time I opened a newspaper and read things. I said, 'Golly it just goes right along with the course I'm taking. This is weird.' . . . Then I notice[d] it with everything I did. . . . People don't even know what they don't know, . . . because you just read the paper and you never see the stuff because it doesn't mean anything to you." A number of adult students also noted their ability to apply knowledge learned in the classroom. "The new horizons, if you will, that have opened for me and the knowledge that I have acquired—being able to use that in the work place. And seeing that knowledge at work . . . And then I can actually see some improvement as far as . . . the things that I accomplish at work." Many of these students commented on their own actions: "The student's responsibility is to be prepared and not expect that much from your professor because you aren't going to get it. You have to prepare yourself."

This case study of Delta University adult undergraduates illustrates the diversity of individuals, their goals, and their needs, as well as the interrelationship of the student, learner, spouse, parent, and citizen roles. The instructional context and complexity of an urban university seems especially tolerant of this diversity.

Appendix E

ELMWOOD COMMUNITY COLLEGE[1]

Adult Lower-Division Undergraduate Students

In 1963 a merger between a local college and an industrial education center formed Elmwood Community College, one of the first in the state. Created to advance the life-long educational development of adults and to strengthen the economic, social, and cultural life of the community, Elmwood has expanded with the growth of the region. The total student body at Elmwood is approximately 30,000, with a mean student age of 30.2 years. Approximately 65% of the students are 25 years of age or older. The current student population is 77.8% white, 17.8% African-American, 3.2% Asian, and 2.5% international. Over 100 countries are represented in the student body. Tuition per quarter is $7.50 per credit hour for in-state students and $107.00 for out-of-state students. The urban campus includes a modern 33-acre site with conveniently located buildings and a large grass quadrangle for informal student gatherings. Elmwood's downtown location facilitates access for its commuter students through direct connections with the city transit system and nearby junctions with three interstate highways.

Elmwood offers classes at three major satellite centers and more than 200 other sites around the county. About 300 television courses are available per quarter. Elmwood offers 70 degree, diploma, and certificate programs. College transfer programs are available in four areas and technical vocational degrees in 60 areas. Elmwood Community College is located in Edwardsville, a hub city for the state with a population of approximately 400,000 and a surrounding service area of 1,200,400.

As one of the larger community colleges in the country, its programs and services are wide and varied. Seventy percent of degree-seeking students choose technical vocational programs. Twenty-five percent of the students enroll in college-transfer programs. In addition, the college offers basic skills programs, including adult literacy and GED classes, and an active corporate and continuing education program. Developmental education is required of students when entry placement tests reveal deficiencies. In any given quarter, approximately 25% of the students are enrolled in one or more of the developmental studies courses in reading, English, and math.

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[1] All names have been changed to provide anonymity.

Background to the Study

This qualitative multiple-case study explored the perceptions and experiences of adult undergraduates. A sample of eight men and six women was drawn from students in the college transfer program; they were interviewed on the Elmwood campus. Average age of the sample was 35 years; the range was 30 to 51. Six were married; five were single; two were divorced; one did not indicate marital status. Nine were caucasian; four were African-American; one was an international student. Nine were employed full-time; three were part-time employees; one was a full-time student; and one was a homemaker. Most were at the sophomore level.

The following descriptive summary presents the key themes from an analysis of all interviews. Part One deals with the students' views of educational experiences and the interaction of adult roles and status with college attendance. Part Two represents their experiences at Elmwood and perceptions of the institution and classroom involvement.

Part One: Adult Perception of Lives that Include College

The Significance of the College Experience

For the majority of these adult participants, school was currently the primary focus of their lives, or paired with a second major role but still a major source of significant satisfaction. The remainder of the participants were focused on school as the source of formal, socially recognized credentials. Those in this first group found great pleasure in college attendance itself and perceived school as an impetus for significant change in their present lives. Members of this group also expressed an intent to continue to incorporate higher education throughout their lives. One commented, "My mind is made up. I'll be in school for the rest of my life." Another expected to be a full-time student for seven years since his ultimate goal was a Ph.D.

These students associated pleasure with being a student because it was "doing something for yourself." School was "exciting," "challenging," "fun," and intellectually stimulating. For a number of adults, school was also an escape. "It's like I have gotten away from all my problems. When I'm in class, I'm in class. I don't worry about the kids or nothing [sic] else." "It's an escape from . . . the workday world." Further, student responsibilities freed some adults from other role responsibilities. "You don't have to worry about what they expect of you at home . . . because they know you're a student and there's [sic] expectations of you as a student." Study participants who dealt with multiple adult responsibilities and roles were less free to enjoy college. "When I can head to class with nothing on my mind but what I have learned that day, that's when I love being a college student. That's the *only* time."

For most of these adults in the first group, school and its related activities took the majority of time in their daily lives. Some found part-time work in order to carry a full course load; others were not working in order to concentrate on course work.

Some changed jobs or work shifts to create circumstances more favorable for undergraduate study. The college experience had positively influenced their perspectives of themselves and/or the future. "For the first time in my life . . . I'm not being rejected in the areas that I used to be rejected [sic] and all that's because of my college experience." Another said, "To finish what I started [school] was the huge thing for me in my life, because I'd never done it before." Yet another saw college attendance as a means of remaining mentally healthy. A different student consciously avoided becoming too comfortable on the job in order to motivate himself and avoid losing sight of his goal to complete college.

Within the group of adults who focused on college work for a credential, some found partial enjoyment in learning, but most viewed school as a passage to the future, "a means to an end." "I decided to further my education because . . . I always knew that I needed more education to be more competitive for jobs." Some chose to restrict the intrusion of school in their lives. "I'm just taking a couple of classes at a time, so I can do them justice [and] be able to have a home life and not let it [school] interfere."

The College/Adult World Interface

While college had a major impact on the lives of the interviewees, life experiences and daily activities affected their ability to function and succeed as students.

Work Issues

Five of the interviewees experienced major conflicts at work because of their college attendance. Two students found large amounts of required overtime hazardous to successful school performance. Two others had experienced supervisory discrimination in the form of an increased workload, making it more difficult to attend class or to set aside time for study. The fifth felt that his employer was anti-education because most of his work colleagues who returned to school were "treated real bad." For other adult students, employers and supervisors were supportive. Five different employers offered some form of tuition reimbursement or assistance; one allowed time off for study and one had an educational leave of absence program. Two interviewees had been able to take advantage of this assistance; others had chosen a major unrelated to company needs and were ineligible. Two supervisors were seen as supportive when they "covered" for the student and agreed with the employee that school was a priority.

Financial Issues

The majority of these adults attended Elmwood because tuition was reasonable. One attended Elmwood, assuming that he would accumulate a significant debt from attending another college his junior and senior years. Another had done extensive research but found no scholarships for adult students. "Society treats us like we should have [done] it when we [were] kids, like everybody else did." For 8 of the 14 interviewees, lack of funds limited the number of enrolled course hours and/or restricted the opportunity for transfer to four-year institutions. Nine depended solely on personal income to pay for school.

The Impact of Relationships

Family members exerted a favorable influence when they encouraged the student and offered praise in social conversations. Parents and spouses were seen as supportive in all but three instances. In these cases, family members wavered between support and criticism.

Spouses supported students when they cooked, "pitched in" around the house, suggested possible solutions for studying difficulties, provided financial assistance, held the student accountable for wise time use, and helped the student study. Older children and adult children verbally encouraged the adult undergraduate, took over parental household tasks and helped the parent study and/or understand the subject matter.

Friendships were also important. Two interviewees worked in an academic environment and found this setting especially supportive. Classmates were helpful because they shared common interests and understood the joys and problems of being a student. Friends also helped to get "your mind off yourself" and were a source of laughter and "good times." Those who attended other schools were sometimes competitive or critical of the student's choice of Elmwood. When they expressed skepticism over an adult's perseverance as a student or pointed out weaknesses, friends had a negative effect. A number of interviewees mentioned friends who would like to go to college themselves, but couldn't. Such persons provided a positive perspective by reminding the student that college attendance was a privilege. Work colleagues and long-time friends sometimes failed to understand the student's efforts and struggles or to value a college degree as the student did. In such cases, the student often had to make the painful decision to leave these persons "behind." Often, students sought new friends who understood and supported their student role. Finally, there was a special category of friends made up of family members and acquaintances who had been adult students themselves and had succeeded in completing a degree program. These individuals were a source of inspiration for some interviewees.

Time-Related Issues

The majority of study participants had fit college attendance and study activities into their lives, but not without cost. Participation in social and sport activities and a good night's sleep were things of the past for most of these adults. "That was the greatest problem . . . balancing the demands on my time and keeping my energy level up." The greatest conflicts in time management were centered in daily activities. "It can cause problems within the family; it can create frictions. It can mess up your work days. It can take away your entertainment. It involves a greater sacrifice than you could ever imagine." One was critical of adults who say they have no time to go to school, noting, "I don't either. Try working 50 hours a week, 24 on the weekend . . . and drive [45 minutes to Elmwood]. Tell me I've got time. I make it." Despite a time crunch, a minority managed to fit community activities into their busy lives because school generated a sense of social responsibility or because these activities were personally fulfilling. These adults were involved in support groups, clubs, churches, service organizations, honor societies, and arts associations.

Past Events and the Decision to Enter Elmwood

The majority of these adult undergraduates had struggled for at least a portion of their high school career. As high school students, three had planned on college attendance, but only one was able to realize this ambition. Five others had thought about college because of parental encouragement; three tried a community college; two went to four-year schools. Four of these left after one semester or less; and the fifth attended for three semesters, with all five leaving with a poor or mixed academic performance. Of the remaining six participants, two went to trade school, two entered the military, and two went to work.

The majority of the study participants also described a past view of work as a "job." Now, they spoke of a shift in focus; they desired work that was satisfying, meaningful, and stable with a "career" dimension. "If you have a job that . . . you have an education for, there's [sic] not that many people that can come along and take that job away from you. They have to have the same credentials that you do." In addition, educational credentials were seen as public validation of personal abilities and knowledge. One felt that he was "cheating" himself if he did not obtain a degree because he "couldn't prove it [this knowledge and ability]" without a degree.

Prior to entering Elmwood, four of the participants had no higher education experience, and one was a high school dropout. Three had experienced a long break between previous college attendance and their present enrollment; four had been adult students in the past; and two had experienced more or less continuous college involvement for seven years or more. The one participant with a previous bachelor's degree was retraining to enter a new field more suited to her abilities and interests.

Current life circumstances for a number of these adults directly influenced the decision to return or enter higher education. Supportive circumstances included: divorce or separation, a higher paying job, addiction recovery, an adult developmental crisis; and viewing oneself as "college material." The primary motivation for entry for nine individuals was a dead-end or unfulfilling job; another four wanted entry-level credentials for a specific career; and another desired personal achievement. Once they began attending classes, many of these adults described positive feelings about themselves after successfully meeting academic challenges. It was challenging to pass a difficult course, navigate admissions and registration, conquer personal fears and doubts, and learn effective study skills. Some found a new zest for life with the student role. A few cited a negative experience on entry, such as discouragement over placement in developmental courses, false assumptions about adult students, and (at another school) prejudicial faculty behavior.

Twelve of the study participants anticipated immediate transfer to a four-year college, either after meeting the requirements for matriculation into upper-division courses or following graduation at Elmwood. Two planned to transfer at a later time. Two sought engineering degrees, two desired degrees in education, three wanted a medical career, three were majoring in a science, while the remaining four were spread among accounting, communications, psychology, and the arts. Five felt they would also pursue a graduate degree.

Part Two:
Adult Perceptions of the Institution and the Classroom

Nature of the Institution

These adult students chose Elmwood because of its reasonable costs, variety of course offerings, convenience, and excellent reputation. Study participants valued Elmwood's supportive atmosphere. They spoke of a high level of support for individual students and particularly for adult students. They believed that Elmwood "give[s] you every opportunity to succeed . . . to prove that you can do the work." "It's a comfortable place to learn for me . . . the teachers are very supportive and you can talk to anyone at anytime." Several valued the opportunity to enter college through an open-access admissions process, while others reported valuing the articulation agreements, which meant that their course work would readily transfer to the closest public four-year institution. Some students made a distinction between a community college and four-year institution: "I think a lot of people come to school here before they take on a real school, a real tough university, to see how well they'll do or to see how much they'll really like [it]." These same individuals believed that there would be a difference at a four-year college: "I'll have to do more on my own and have less outside help available."

While these students valued Elmwood and viewed it as an excellent institution, they also noted several areas needing change. Several spoke of a need to improve physical facilities, "make it cleaner and neater and not so crowded," and desired improved parking. Many wanted more classes, particularly at night, as well as courses targeted to particular academic subjects. Most of the interviewees were seriously concerned about the rising tuition costs and difficulties with financial aid procedures. They identified a need for more financial support. These students felt a significant tension surrounding college costs and difficulties in accessing financial support. Several comments identified the potential benefit of special services for adults, such as a special orientation, an advisement program, and an organization for adult students. Many students felt more visible publicity was needed to encourage adult enrollment in community colleges.

Academic Support Services and Honor Societies

A number of these students were involved in academic support services because of varied academic backgrounds and a lack of recent experience in academic studies. Many had also experienced an extended break since their last involvement in higher education. They viewed their involvement with support services as part of their academic involvement. Most mentioned their initial testing for English and math proficiency during the entry process. "Those tests revealed my . . . poor grasp of mathematics, so I had to go back through some remedial work in that area and that took some time." Of the five individuals who mentioned involvement in these remedial courses, two spoke of particular frustrations. One found that a math course had to be repeated several times in order to grasp the material; the other disliked participating in courses with high school students who did not view the courses as "serious business." The others saw these classes as a normal part of their college work: "I wanted to learn math and I was excited about having the opportunity to get in there and do that." Two individuals spoke of the value of the tutoring program, with one reporting the importance of the book rental service with the tutoring program.

Two students reported current involvement in Phi Theta Kappa and its positive benefits as a scholastic honorary society and as a means of encouraging community service. "I think there is a lot of good things that will come out of it . . . [such as] talk[ing] to people who are seriously motivated about getting an education. It's going to be a positive in whatever college you transfer."

The Classroom Experience

Professors and Students

Most professors and instructors were valued because they provided informative, organized, and helpful classes that focused on providing explanations of content. Many students valued instructors who included active questioning and participation in classes. "All instructors encourage the students to be prepared for the next day and they ask you questions involving the material . . . . They just encourage you to participate . . . . They encourage you to study." Some students also valued more challenging learning environments provided by some instructors and professors, as well as those who provided more individualized help for students. Some were concerned when faculty had different ways of teaching, requiring students to learn new and different ways of studying the material.

Faculty and staff were supportive of adult students through their efforts to know the student's name, by their concerns for the student's personal welfare, and when they expressed interest in the student's progress toward a degree. Study participants also felt that faculty and staff showed respect for adult students. "I would say there are some teachers that I've had who are continually asking about my program, 'How am I doing?' and that sort of thing. Every time they see me, they want to know what I'm going to be doing next. They show a real interest in my academic welfare and are curious." "Every faculty person—the door was open and the extra help I needed [was there]." Although Elmwood was a large institution, these students believed that they were treated personally. "They know who you are and you feel like there's a bond there. I mean I'm not just a social security number." Such personal attention was illustrated by three individuals who described particularly difficult situations in which faculty or staff members personally intervened without student solicitation and sometimes without prior knowledge of the student. Faculty and staff actions were instrumental in resolving the difficulties.

Most interviewees believed that professors respected and held positive, accepting attitudes toward adult students. "They seem to be a little more deferential towards older students." Many of the adult students believed that instructors created or adapted the course to meet adult needs, most often in evening courses. "And it's possible because they do have so many older students here that they've learned to accommodate us better." "I think they just have a better attitude at night because, I guess, they feel like the adults are serious about the classes and maybe they have a little bit more patience with adults than they do with the kids."

There were extremely varied perceptions of the student body at Elmwood. Differing perspectives seemed to be based on contact with different student populations. These perspectives were influenced by contact with day students or evening students, as well as with students in different academic courses or programs of study. When describing the Elmwood environment, interviewees saw a diversity of adult students, from corporate workers to housewives, welfare recipients and international students. "That's one of the fun things about this school. You have the whole spectrum. There's [sic] just all kinds of people here." Diversity in student motivation, commitment, academic background and class attendance patterns was also noted. Although study participants reported different kinds of adult students, they believed that most adult students were achievement- and goal-oriented, had insight, maturity, and knowledge, and were committed to their studies. "I think when adults come back to school they're there ready to excel." "They want to be here because they want to make something different of their life."

Most interviewees valued and enjoyed younger students in their community college classrooms. Interviewees saw a portion of the younger student group as bright and eager. However, sometimes these younger students did not want to be at Elmwood, because their friends were attending four-year institutions where they had not been admitted. These younger students seemed to be biding their time until they could transfer. The adult students also described younger students who lacked confidence, were quiet and passive in classes, often seemed to lack motivation and commitment to learning, and sometimes expressed negative attitudes toward college. They also identified a subgroup of younger students as distractors, because they "whined and complained" about work assignments, disrupted classes, slept, or talked with friends and seemed to want to be "babied." Lastly, there appeared to be a group of younger students who, like the adult students, were committed to getting an education at Elmwood. Some of these younger students were perceived as having an easier time at the community college than their adult classmates; "younger students don't have to study nearly as much as the older ones, 'cause it's already pretty much fresh on their minds." However, these adults believed that recency of academic knowledge was only one factor in student success. Study participants believed that an adult orientation to life made the adult student a more serious and committed learner. As one person suggested, "Adult distractions are serious. Making money, looking after your family, keeping your relationship . . . your marriage or whatever—we['re] playing with real houses. The [younger] students are worried about having fun. Their concerns are frivolous.... For grownups, our concerns are nuts and bolts and their concerns are wings and breezes." A few adults noted that those who most often dropped out of courses were the younger students. "Some of the classes . . . will start out with 20 some people and by the end of the quarter, half of them will not be there for some reason or other. But I don't know whether it's lack of interest or they just fall behind or what."

Learning Experiences

The majority of students valued an organized classroom, a syllabus, study guides/aids, and other instructional support materials, such as videotapes. These classroom and learning resources were particularly valued in the beginning quarters of course work. Sixty-five percent of these students believed their involvement in the classroom was favorably influenced by sitting near the front. Most believed that this classroom placement helped them to focus and to be less easily distracted. A few of these "first three rows" individuals believed that classroom placement denoted commitment to learning; the closer you were to the front, the more committed you were to learning. The remainder of the students preferred to be close to an aisle, to be in the middle of the classroom, or to be in the back of the room. Reasons given for sitting in locations other than the front of the classroom included: late entry due to work commitments, a desire to view the whole classroom or be in a position to read the entire blackboard, or a belief that seat placement was not relevant to learning.

Most study participants believed in regular class attendance, reading assignments, note-taking, and in a lot of repetition to review and memorize concepts, definitions and formulas. "Well, it depends on the course. I put in a lot of time and then—the only thing [that's] done it is just repetition. And if I really . . . run into something that I can't get into my head, I'll sit down with a pen and it might take three or four extra hours, but I'll sit down with a paper and summarize the material and that's a sure way to make it stick." Thus, they worked very hard at remembering, retaining, and reproducing information for course assignments and tests.

Many of these students believed that they were good students if they actively participated. "I think when you take an active participation in something, you just remember it better and it's easier to work it out. I think if you're passive, you're not paying attention. And you're not really going to retain for very long what it is that's being discussed." There were others who noted their reticence to speak out in class; they waited until after class to speak with fellow students or with the teacher. "One thing is harder to do, it seems, for me — is to ask questions . . . from the instructor." Certain situations led some to speak in class. For example, several noted, "I don't ask questions until there's something that I don't understand." Another would ask questions, "if the instructor says something that she is unclear herself of what she said [sic]." Others believed that courses focused on life experiences made it easier to respond in class.

Many of these adult undergraduates were concerned about learning how to study. "It's very hard, very hard, because like I said, I'm a person who didn't even study when I was a kid . . . . It's tough when you start up because you don't know how to study; you have no practice of study; you don't understand what to do. I mean, I'm still learning how to study. It's very rough because you got [sic] so many different methods on how to study really." "I think the first shock was when I looked around and everybody was taking notes and I wondered what they were writing. I didn't have any idea . . . I didn't have any study skills or study habits. . . . I had to teach myself and pick up pretty quick. It was frightening." Several of the students reported they were slow readers. Several others noted that they worked very hard at keeping up with their studying. There were some, however, who reported just barely being able to complete their assignments and cram for tests. As one commented, "Returning students — you know, your mind doesn't work as quick as it did when it was 18 or 20." Several students reported studying with others in group study sessions. Two others reported avoiding group study sessions, believing that students who were in those groups had not studied themselves and wanted someone else to do their work.

There were mixed feelings about evaluation of course work and grades. Several reported valuing grades as proof of their hard work and efforts at mastering course material. Grades influenced their sense of self-esteem, achievement, and status. "And I proved to myself that, yes, I was an excellent student." "They [grades] give you good feedback . . . they're an effective method to tell you how well you're doing and if . . . you're getting enough time to study." Several noted the importance of grades in accessing financial aid and when transferring to another school. A few indicated that grades influenced their motivation, while a few reported that grades meant nothing to them.

College Learning and Life Connections

Most of these adults saw connections between their classroom learning and their lives. "That's what helped me to make the grades I make [referring to his previous travel experiences during military service]." "I guess I am here to learn, but [also] to demonstrate and authenticate what I already know." Beyond the more career-related courses, many students reported the value of general education, lower-division courses in their lives. For example, one student noted that what he had learned had affected his church work, his family relationships, and his life as an adult. "I understand my spouse better because of the sociology . . . I understand my parents better because of that course. You know, I didn't understand the weatherman on the news for a long time until I took geography . . . . I didn't know what a GNP was and I heard about the national GNP of various nations and now I know how to calculate it. So, I can relate to world news better." Others felt they were able to broadly apply the knowledge from course work. "You use it very extensively when you go into a voting booth to decide which levers you're going to pull." "The physics [class] now is marvelous, because he is teaching us to problem solve."

Adult students at Elmwood Community College represented great diversity and a wide variety of academic needs. The community college proved to be extremely supportive of these individuals as they sought to become better educated. Their experiences at Elmwood had far-ranging effects on their internal psychological world and on their daily lives.

Appendix F

FREMONT UNIVERSITY[1]
Undergraduate Programs at a Public University

Granted a charter in 1794, Fremont University has evolved through a variety of institutional forms. In 1869, it was designated the state's federal land-grant institution and today continues that teaching, research, and public service mission. As a complex multi-university, it offers over 300 degree programs, master's in 87 fields, and doctoral work in 52 fields. Its enrollment of 25,000 students includes 19,000 undergraduates and 6,000 graduate students. Adults, age 25 and above, represent 17% of the undergraduate student population. Tuition for a three-hour undergraduate course is $261 (in-state) and $693 (out-of-state).

Located in metropolitan West City, with a population of 335,000, the campus is accessible by two major interstate highways and is next to the downtown business district. Fremont typifies a traditional collegiate environment with 35% of undergraduates housed on-campus and a major emphasis on intercollegiate athletics. Historic and contemporary buildings spread over 289 acres surrounding the historic Hill campus. The University has strong alliances with agricultural, scientific, and business activities in the state and views itself as the state's leading public university.

Committed to serving adult students, Fremont's Evening School began in 1946 as an Extension Center, and in 1970 joined the University's Division of Continuing Education. The Evening School provides registration by mail, separate evening school registration, advising, and printed information for students of all ages who participate in evening classes. It serves 3,000 students; half are undergraduates. The Evening School offers basic lower-division courses and electives for most four-year degree programs. In addition, a bachelor's degree may be completed in the evening in: College of Business Administration (BS in Business Administration with a major in Accounting, General Business, Economics, Finance, Marketing, Management, or Public Administration); College of Liberal Arts (BA in American Studies, Economics, Political Science, Psychology, and Public Administration, and a BS in Sociology); and College of Education (BS in Human Services and in Industrial Training). In 1990, the Office for Re-entry and Nontraditional Students was created by the Division of Student Affairs. This office and the Evening School conducted a survey in spring, 1992, which indicated that 48% of the adult undergraduates were full-time students. Fifty-eight percent were married; 58% were female; 6% were minority (4% African-American); 42% used employer tuition reimbursement.

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[1] All names have been changed to provide anonymity.

Background to the Study

This qualitative multiple-case study examined the experiences and perceptions of adult undergraduates. A sample of 13 upper- and lower-division students was interviewed on the Fremont campus, including five men and eight women ranging in age from 31 to 47 years; the average age was 38. Seven were married; five were single or divorced, and one was widowed. Nine were Caucasian, three were African-American, and one was Hispanic. Five were employed full-time, two on the Fremont campus; four worked part-time at one or more jobs; four were not employed.

The following two-part descriptive summary presents the key themes from an analysis of all the interviews. Part One deals with issues in the personal lives of the adult students that affected their college experience. Part Two presents the adult student perceptions of Fremont and the college classroom.

Part One: Adult Perception of Lives that Include College

Previous Higher Education and the Entry/Reentry Decision

Nine of the 13 participants had previously attended a community college; four had received associate degrees. Seven of the nine who had community college experience had also attended a four-year school, most often for a brief period. Of these seven students, three had previously been students at Fremont as young adults. The remaining four had either attended business school, a diploma nursing program, another four-year institution, or had no prior postsecondary experience.

Five of the study participants felt they had been inadequately prepared for college during their high school years, both academically and socially. Consequently, they experienced "shock" and a sense of being "lost" during their initial college enrollment. As adult students, some felt they were still dealing with academic deficiencies from high school. Several mentioned the negative impact of poor academic performance during their earlier college attendance which created a fear that they might fail again after re-entry and jeopardize their success as adult college students. However, after their initial semester, all found they could be highly successful as students. One other individual who had previously attended a non-accredited institution was frustrated on re-entry because of lost credit hours.

Entering or re-entering higher education was motivated by psychological factors and the restrictions of external circumstances. Psychological factors that supported the entry or re-entry decision included: a desire for advancement at work, perceived enhancement of self-esteem linked to degree attainment, boredom and a need for intellectual stimulation, and adult developmental turning points. Developmental turning points most often involved the end or diminution of a key adult role, such as parent or spouse, or a dissatisfaction with present life circumstances followed by reevaluation and a major life change. External circumstances influencing college attendance were most often related to the key issues of time and money. However, the need to retrain for a different occupation due to injury or early retirement and the need for entry credentials in a desired profession also provided motivation.

Time-Related Issues

Study participants struggled with finding time to attend classes, as well as to study and to complete class assignments. Seven modified their major life roles and time commitments to become full-time students. For six adults, this meant leaving their current job; the seventh found her parental role altered when all her children entered school. Two others, who were part-time students, had also changed the nature of their jobs by relocating in an attempt to make time for school. However, both of these as well as other participants found that class schedules conflicted with work schedules, even when work schedules were flexible. The remainder of these students re-entered as part-time students, often accessing classes through Fremont's Evening School. Almost all of the participants had changed their lives by dropping or avoiding participation in community activities. Those who participated did so in a limited fashion. They chose tasks that were time-limited; they avoided leadership responsibilities; and/or they became involved only in those activities that had highest priority for them, such as church, children's activities, or professional organizations.

Financial Issues

The majority of these adults cited money for school and related expenses as a major decision factor in their entry. Some who had attended as young adults were shocked to discover current costs. A number felt Fremont was an expensive institution. Others had found their progress toward a degree blocked in the past because they lacked funds. One commented, "If you don't have the money, you can't take the time to be a student. You borrow; you cut back; you put your children and your family under immense pressure." Another participant had taken nearly 17 years to obtain a degree and had been able to finish only because of early retirement and the freedom to complete degree requirements as a full-time student.

Accessing funds for school was difficult because these adults found they were judged by the same financial aid standards used for young adults, which assumed that they were a dependent and would receive assistance from parents. In addition, saving a portion of their income was impossible for most because living expenses consumed their entire salary. "It was just a vicious circle because I had a . . . job which put me higher than I would be eligible for a student loan . . . I would have had to continue working full-time to have gone to school . . . If I quit, I would have had to [be] without a job for a year in order to be eligible for financial aid, but how was I supposed to survive for a year?" Only one participant had obtained a school loan; none had scholarships; seven were using personal earnings or savings; four relied on a spouse or parents. Four had access to an employer tuition reimbursement program, but even this was problematical if it required their own funds initially. One participant used money from the sale of his home and another added that, "Creative financing is just juggling anyway you can to make it."

Value of an Education and a Degree

These adults did expect monetary benefits in the future either through advancement or a better job after earning their bachelor's degree. Two viewed education as a source of economic security in uncertain times. A number of participants were proud to be the first member of their family to obtain a degree. To be a student and receive a degree symbolized a significant achievement in their lives. It enhanced their self-esteem and provided a sense of completion in relation to earlier, interrupted collegiate experiences. Some desired a productive place in society; a college degree provided the key to contribute to the broader world. Another noted that, "I found without a college degree a lot of times I would end up doing the work for somebody else that had the degree and they would get the credit. . . . I want to change that." Many of these adults valued learning itself and the intellectual benefits associated with learning activities. "When I first came back, I remember thinking how many days I had spent in my life without learning something new and what a shame it was. . . . So, for me, being in school is really a joyful experience." One participant pointed out that the stress associated with school was a positive stress as opposed to the stress of doing a job you dislike. Several also commented on their enjoyment of the college experience itself and their desire to participate as fully as possible in the campus environment. Some who desired such an experience found that part-time attendance did not correlate with the degree of participation they desired.

Five of those interviewed noted that an additional degree was a possibility. Most had thought about a master's degree, but two had considered doctorates. "A B.S. is just not enough; a B.S. really is giving you a background so that you can learn." Other members of the sample had thought about graduate work but felt the need to re-evaluate once the bachelor's had been obtained.

Significant Relationships

The majority of these adult students reported being positively influenced and encouraged by spouses and siblings who also had been adult students. Four participants had spouses who had been students, two of whom were now serving as the major wage earner, allowing the student to carry a full-time course load. One of these also indicated that his entire family was now involved in higher education. Three others had siblings who were currently students or had earned degrees. Those who had been or were students provided uniquely valued support to the adult student; some were also able to provide advice about course content or professors.

Friendships were important for several of the participants. For two, they formed a significant support network. For others, they were a source of additional encouragement. Some felt friendships were unimportant because their friends did not share their educational values. Friends and acquaintances who were also students and were in the work environment were a source of important support for two adult students. "Everyone I've worked with is either working on their BS degree or working on their master's, so, it's great."

Several of these adults felt their student experience affected their children. Two felt that they were role models for children in the family and that it encouraged the children to consider college for themselves. Others believed they were better prepared to answer their children's school-related questions. Two adult students valued sharing Fremont's educational and cultural resources with their children. Another spoke of developing an increased understanding of his children's educational struggles. As a result of his own experiences as a student, he was more tolerant and conversant with his children about their school concerns and activities.

A few of these students spoke of difficulties they experienced when the student role conflicted with another of their roles as an adult. Most often these students felt "guilty" because they were unable to fulfill their customary role due to class attendance or a need to study.

Time Management Skills

Learning time management skills was important for these students as they integrated class and study time into their lives. Three of the participants had been involved as part-time students for a period of ten years or more. They most often took one course per semester during evening hours. These individuals did not speak of having difficulties in managing time for study. Difficulties did arise, however, when a customary routine changed. For example, when one adult switched from two evening classes per semester to one evening and one day class, established study times had to be adjusted.

Several study participants arranged their activities in blocks of time as a means of accomplishing all that needed to be done. Practically, this translated into a class schedule that involved consecutive classes meeting the same days each semester for full-time students; part-time students were more flexible, but still preferred allocating the same night or nights to school the year round. Time was also managed by considering the work load involved in courses and the background knowledge brought to a course. Courses involving a lot of reading were balanced, if possible, with others that did not; if course content was completely unfamiliar, hours carried that semester were often reduced.

Time was more difficult to manage and less was accomplished for a number of these adults when the day was fragmented among many different activities. For example, going from home to work, to school and back to work and then home to study was more difficult than one full day devoted to work and another full day involving only school-related activities. One full-time student felt that he had "less time now that I don't work" and that time was "more valuable than it's ever been."

Initial Experiences

These adults had many concerns as they began their college experience. For one adult with no prior higher education experience, "it was like going to the moon." Another novice student struggled with fears throughout the first class and acted "green." Successful completion of that course was a significant milestone. For a different participant who had been successful in starting a business, "I think that [was] a real positive image build[er]. I feel ... that helped in my schooling. I guess I consider myself lucky ... that I feel like ... I'm capable of accepting the challenge [of school]." Yet others spoke of "easing into" the student role by beginning with one course and gradually increasing the number of hours carried. One of the most frequently mentioned concerns was the ability to gain or revive study skills.

Part Two:
Adult Perceptions of the Institution and the Classroom

Nature of the Institution

Fremont was judged as a "university" which offered specialized curricula, a quality degree, a challenging learning experience, a large and diverse environment, and an excellent academic reputation. The complexity of Fremont's programs and environment, as well as the adult student diversity, contributed to differing perceptions of the university. Some chose Fremont because of the Evening School with its ready access and positive attitudes towards adult students. Others, in daytime academic courses and programs, based their selection of Fremont on a desire for specialized expertise and its geographic proximity. Most of these individuals were place-bound by work and family; however, two participants relocated to West City specifically to pursue a degree at Fremont in addition to seeking work for themselves or their spouses.

On the whole, the participants' understanding of Fremont was framed by their specific classroom learning environment and their academic major. The most salient, positive academic experience for these adult students was the quality and helpfulness of the faculty. All of the students noted that quality, personal, faculty-guided learning experiences were the basis of their positive perceptions at Fremont. The most common academic concern was couched in terms of limited academic resources. Participants spoke of "huge" classes, insufficient laboratories and classrooms, an inadequate number of professors, lack of access to specific curricula during evening hours, and poor adult student support systems. "It's just a volume of people here and the diversity of stuff they're trying to cover and the resources are spread thin." A few noted that engineering and computer science curricula were available in the evenings at other institutions, but not at Fremont. Other comments focused on the lack of technological student supports: "That was the biggest disappointment . . . I came from [another university where] . . . I took care of everything over the phone." By far, parking problems were the most mentioned nonacademic concern for these students. For women attending the Evening School, security was an added issue when customary parking was displaced for basketball fans. One working student taking a daytime class noted, "That's really frustrating, . . . having to take maybe 15 or 20 minutes more than you normally would because you know that you won't find a parking space . . . I actually missed a class once because I drove around for about 20 minutes looking for a parking space and I never found one."

Contrasts Between Day and Night Students

Student perceptions of Fremont often differed according to day or night-time attendance. The Evening School and its special consideration for adults was valued by the evening adult students. "I think the thing that made me come back is because of the evening school program." It "works around [my] schedule." They valued the courses scheduled at night, registration by mail, and access to faculty for advising and support that accommodated their other time commitments. Evening students noted several concerns that were not reported by day-time students. These included problems with resources to support learning such as scheduled course study meetings accessible to and specifically for night students (i.e., engineering majors), and tutoring sessions, particularly in math. Many reported difficulties in scheduling courses. They desired more variety, a different sequencing of courses, as well as courses scheduled at times compatible with work and family schedules. "It would be really nice if they could offer other degree programs in the evenings . . . [It] would be the answer to my prayers, if I could go on the weekends to school." Evening students sometimes attempted to access day classes but faced significant difficulties. Many evening students believed they were missing out on academic information. "You miss out a lot on what's going on. . . . If I had been a full-time student or have been more involved just in the department, I would have known about a [special mini-term] class."

The daytime adult students experienced a different environment. They spoke of ease of access and support for their involvement in classes and the institution. These individuals valued their time on campus. "I enjoyed just walking around ... It's a different world around here. . . . It's a joy." Daytime students felt Fremont was showing an increased interest in adult students. "I think this university is trying. And since I've been an older student, in just the two years, they've improved a lot. 'Cause they didn't have any programs when I started for older students. . . . I think they just need to keep doing as much as they can, any way they can find to do it." Day students desired a "support group" for adults. They suggested an adult student organization and more activities for adults, such as intramural sports, family activities, student government seats for adult students, and social gatherings or coffee hours.

Individuals in both day and night classes desired a special adult student orientation program. For some, it would include information on studying and time management; for others, it would provide a beginning support group; one felt it would be particularly helpful to incoming adults without prior college experience to "show them how they can ease themselves into college life . . . It's frightening and it scares them." Both groups expressed concerns over transfer credits; they often lost 15 to 36 hours of credit when prior work was compared with current program requirements.

The Classroom Experience

Faculty: The Key Element

These adult students believed that the faculty made a difference in their student lives. They valued professors who were knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and organized. However, they also noted other characteristics of overriding importance. Many students were concerned about potential and actual superior attitudes on the part of faculty, based on a teacher-student hierarchy. They also spoke of intimidating and demeaning faculty behaviors. Therefore, they valued professors who created respectful, comfortable relationships between themselves and students. In particular, they appreciated faculty who valued adult students, gave credit to experience-based adult knowledge, understood adult life and the effect of turbulent circumstances on student performance, and projected a sense of respect and compassion for adult students and their academic struggles.

Most study participants spoke to some form of a personal relationship between themselves and the faculty that differed from the usual. "They are not as authoritative to you. . . . You're not on an equal footing with them, but they try to be friendly with you." Most often, such a relationship was expressed totally through classroom interaction. In this context, faculty showed personal attention when they called people by name and make a point of knowing students' names. Faculty were helpful and accessible when "They come in; they make a student feel important. . . . The first day of class [the professor] said, 'You are the reason I'm here. . . . I want you to learn. I want to help you.'" Most of these students commented on faculty who were accessible through office hours, academic advising, or a willingness to converse.

Several students reported faculty who were particularly helpful because they considered the student's current work load when suggesting courses. However, in a few instances, faculty advising was unhelpful and hurried. Some objected to faculty who failed to consider the student's academic background relative to specific curricula; these adults often later faced major problems in courses where they either lacked prerequisites or had a significant time lapse since completing prerequisites.

Class Interaction and Life Experiences

Faculty actions in the classroom made an important difference for these students. They preferred an interactive classroom with varied instructional strategies, student participation, and faculty-student interchange. Real-life examples and experiences that elaborated on a concept or application were also prized. "I like class participation. And after working eight hours, I don't want to sit in class and listen to an instructor just talk the whole three hours. I want some type of involvement to keep me motivated, to keep me alert. So, I look for a lot of stimulation from the instructor." These students also participated by raising questions for clarification and understanding, by providing examples and experiences, or by asking questions to aid reticent members of the class. These adult students often mentioned a larger concern for a classroom environment that went beyond memorized content. "They make you actually want to learn more or whatever it is that they're trying to get across, they make you want to know what it is."

Another aspect of adult involvement was reflected in beliefs about their location in the classroom. They felt that sitting in the front signalled a commitment to learning or was an important strategy for effective learning and success. "Everybody who sits up front, to me, really wants to learn. That's always one of the first things I learned. You have the ones that sit in the back. They're always going to be disrupting." "I'm asking questions and I'm up front and sometimes I feel like the professor and me [sic] are having a dialogue. . . . So in some ways, I think you get more personalized attention if you're in a class with traditional students, if the professor is . . . really wanting to teach somebody." Others, however, preferred to sit in the middle or back of the classroom in order to see the whole class, or for their convenience. They did not view location as a factor in their class involvement.

This belief in the importance of teacher-student interaction posed a particular issue for daytime students, particularly in the sciences and engineering, who were very concerned about large classes. "I was really surprised at the size of the classes probably more than anything else. There was what [sic] I call herd classes . . . They're the prerequisites for almost every type of degree . . . [It's] a problem." In such classes these adults viewed faculty as distant talking machines, establishing an informal or dictated norm that precluded questions because questions slowed the class down. Consequently, student understanding was sacrificed and the learning experience was inferior. Several adults reported that they returned to a community college for basic courses rather than face these huge sections. In contrast, one individual noted that, while she originally went to a junior college for small classes, "Since I've been back, I don't feel that way [negatively about large classes]. . . . I mean, I've been in huge classes, but I still feel that I have that personal attention. What I have to think [is that] it has a lot to do with me putting myself into it." Some of the students mentioned faculty in large classes who made a point of connecting with students.

About half of the students referred to courses taken with teaching assistants (TA's); some noted difficulties. "They're [TA's] living in that double world too [like adult students]. . . . [They] try to impress their higher ups plus they've got work that they have to get done and a lot of times, they'll brush you off. I don't think it is intentional. I think . . . they've got too much to do." A few noted positive experiences in classes taught by knowledgeable and effective TA's. However, most suggested, "it's detrimental to be older, 'cause . . . they [TA's] feel intimidated and they feel resentful."

Most of the adults valued younger students in their classes. These younger adults were judged to be bright and friendly, expressing a fresh and different perspective on life and course content; consequently adults often felt younger themselves. Several expressed concern over the passivity of younger students in the classroom, feeling they were blindly satisfied with whatever came along, as well as some who were too socially oriented or who lacked commitment to college.

Learning from an Adult Perspective

Many of these students saw their learning as closely interwoven with their life experiences; the experiences gave meaning to the learning. Many saw a connection between current learning and either their past or current work and family life. "As far as some of the engineering courses, I'm using a lot of that at work. So, you're able to relate. . . . What seems in theory just bizarre, that it would never work . . . you can go out to work and you can see . . . and then you see it in class and then [you] understand it." There was a subgroup of adult students who noted the difficulties of learning totally new content. These individuals (a) felt learning as an older adult was more difficult, (b) identified a gap between past and current schooling as a problem because they were "rusty" with foundational content, or (c) identified a knowledge deficiency, such as a lack of science background. Some believed that such deficiencies combined with late college entry produced an initial lack of confidence for adult undergraduates. "I see a lot of adult students that don't have a real positive personal image. They're unsure and they really don't know if they can handle it." "Since I'm older, I feel like I have to work harder at memorizing and learning material." "And I'm playing catch-up along[side] . . . kids who have had all this . . . It's stressful . . . I didn't have any college prep classes; I don't have a foreign language, I have one semester [of] high school algebra." These individuals raised serious concern about faculty who "just take-for-granted that you always know it." Many desired faculty who would not presume past knowledge, but provided some guidance about how to gain such knowledge or provide a review of past knowledge that was foundational to a course.

Most of the students reported significant amounts of study time, with day time/full-time students reporting three to four hours of study for each class hour. Many of the adults equated studying with good grades. Grades were a yardstick for how well the student was doing, a reward, a status attainment, and a symbol of hard work. Others placed greater emphasis on the processes of studying, learning and mastery of subject matter. Many students recognized that they learned in order to meet professorial requirements, but they also desired learning that applied to life and work, or an understanding of underlying processes and global perspectives.

About 40% sought the assistance of others in learning, either college-educated fellow workers,graduate assistant's, TA's, or hired tutors. Most felt class attendance and note taking were important in understanding content, as were notes developed from the text, memorizing, and reading. "You do the reading; you're not just eating something and then regurgitating it. . . . You're trying to really analyze it and say what you think about it." Three-fourths formed voluntary study groups to prepare for one or more tests or to assist them during a course. All found the group experience valuable for learning and for general support and sharing. However, some found their lives far too busy to regularly schedule a study group; others found it difficult to identify someone who was easy to work with, who was equally focused on studying, and who was at their level of understanding.

These adults wanted to better themselves. As part of this pursuit, they viewed themselves as dedicated and serious students. "You're an adult; you're responsible for what you learn." They were unique individuals with clear goals. Clearly their university experience was an important aspect of their lives and their futures.

Appendix G

SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

ADULTS AS UNDERGRADUATES
DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

(1) Please circle the appropriate choice:

(a) Male Female

(b) Married Single Divorced Widowed Other

(c) Caucasian Afro-American Hispanic Asian Other

(d) Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

(2) Please fill in the blanks:

(a) Age ________

(b) Number of hours (current course load) ____________

(c) Academic major ________________________

(d) Full or Part-time ___________________

(e) If not formally employed, please indicate current status:

(f) Reasons for selecting this academic institution/program:

____

____

____

(3) Please circle ALL that apply:

(a) Which of the following campus services have you used?

admissions

library

student health

registration

advisement

career placement

financial aid

counseling

other ________

(b) Who provides support/assistance to you in your student role?

child/children
siblings
employer
campus personnel
spouse
friends
work colleagues
other ________
parents
fellow students
faculty

(c) How are you paying for tuition and school expenses?

loans
savings
parent(s)
scholarships
personal earnings
other ___________
employer assistance
spouse

(d) Have things changed at work because of your student role?

job responsibilities
work related travel
involvement in new projects
number of hours worked
relationships with work colleagues
other ______________

(e) Are you the primary caregiver for:

child/children
others ____________________
parents
other family members

(f) Have you changed your participation in any of the following community activities since you became a student?

church
leadership roles
children's extracurricular activities
other ______________________________
volunteer service
community organizations
neighborhood activities

(4) Please circle:

Do you participate in campus activities outside of the classroom?

Yes No

Appendix H

SAMPLE

INITIAL LETTER

April 8, 1992

1~
2~
3~

Dear 4~:

You are a member of a large and growing group. Adults who are 25 or older currently represent 40% of the undergraduate population. However, almost nothing is known about their experiences on college campuses. You are being asked to participate in the first major national study of adult undergraduates to be funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Your school was selected as a study site and is supporting this research.

Your name was **randomly** selected from a list of adult students at your institution who were at least 30 years old, currently enrolled and in good academic standing. We believe that these criteria will lead us to persons like yourself who have direct knowledge of what it is like to be an adult learner in a college classroom. Only twenty (20) students from [name of college] will be interviewed. With this small number, your contribution is very important and significant.

We would like to conduct **one** audio taped interview with you. Past interviews have generally lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. We will be traveling to the [name of college] campus four times during May and June, 1992. We will be there May 11-15; June 1-5; June 15-19 and June 22-26, 1992. After you receive this letter, we will be contacting you by phone regarding an appointment.

We are interested in your current or recent classroom experiences, your past experience, if any, with other colleges, your reasons for being in school and what helps and hinders your learning. You can choose what you will say about each of these topics. No embarrassing questions will be asked and your responses will be **completely confidential**. This interview will be analyzed with the

4~
April 8, 1992
Page 2

other interviews for common themes and qualities of adult learning in the undergraduate setting. The results of the analysis will be published, but your identity will remain anonymous. If you desire, you can obtain a copy of the study findings.

Although it is not possible to pay you for your time, we will try to conduct the interview at a time convenient for you. We recognize that you are a busy and involved person. In volunteering to participate in this study, you have an opportunity to make a vital contribution to our understanding of adult learning in the classroom. You may also increase your understanding of your own goals and learning experiences.

If you have further questions or would like to have more information, you may contact Dr. Carol E. Kasworm or Sally Blowers at The University of Tennessee-Knoxville. Our phone number during working hours is: (615) 974-2574.

Sincerely,

Carol E. Kasworm

Sally S. Blowers

Appendix I

SAMPLE CONSENT FORM

Subject No. ________
Institution ________________

RESEARCH PROJECT CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROJECT STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING

I acknowledge that I have been adequately briefed about the research study "Adult Undergraduate Students: Patterns of Involvement" which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education. I believe I can make an informed decision about participating and I acknowledge that:

a. I understand the purpose of the study and my role in providing my perceptions during the interview.

b. my participation is voluntary, not mandatory; my involvement in the interview indicates my consent to participate and that, if I so choose, I can refuse to continue the interview process at any point.

c. my responses will be made anonymously and that at no time will my identity be revealed in reports of the researh findings; I give my permission for the investigators to anonymously quote selected responses when publishing results in scholarly journals and proceedings.

d. following the study, feedback regarding the findings will be furnished at my request.

____
Subject Signature Date

____
Interviewer's Signature Date

I wish to receive a synopsis of the study findings. Please send a copy to:

____
____
____
____

Appendix J

SAMPLE FEEDBACK LETTER

Date

Dear :

During the spring, you were interviewed as part of a study of adult undergraduates funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The [name of college] adult degree program was one of six institutional sites. The study was based on the transcribed text of the audiotaped interviews and focused on your perception of the undergraduate student role. We were interested in the key ideas you and the other interviewees expressed about changes in your lives since becoming students. We were also interested in what you valued about your experience at [name of college] and the decisions you made in order to fit school into your life.

All of the [name of college] interviews have been analyzed and we have written a brief descriptive summary of the key themes and findings. This summary is included with this letter.

In order to be as accurate as possible in our report, we are asking you to read and react to the summary. Your participation in the study has been vital. Your present reactions to the summary are a very important part of the research process. Because there are more than 600 pages of interview text, we have been able to present only the most vital and salient descriptive themes. But we may not have presented an accurate picture of your experience. YOUR feedback will help to correct any inaccuracies or omissions in our summary.

Please take a few minutes to review the summary and note your key reactions and suggestions on the enclosed form. Be sure to comment on how well the summary represents **your** experience and beliefs about Charles College. It was a privilege to interview you. Thank you for responding to this letter. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

SAMPLE FEEDBACK FORM

INTERVIEWEE FEEDBACK SHEET

Please mark the line indicating YOUR feeling about the summary.

Easy to read ______________ Hard to read

Boring ______________ Interesting

Helped me understand my experience ______________ Did not help me understand my experience

For EACH section of the summary named please check BOTH items.

Becoming a Student (Again) (page 2)

Describes my experience ______________ Doesn't describe my experience

Accurate ______________ Inaccurate

The Time Factor (pages 2 and 3)

Describes my experience ______________ Doesn't describe my experience

Accurate ______________ Inaccurate

Financial Issues (pages 3 and 4)

Describes my experience ______________ Doesn't describe my experience

Accurate ______________ Inaccurate

Advisement (page 4)

Describes my experience ______________ Doesn't describe my experience

Accurate ______________ Inaccurate

Family and Work Supports

The Family Factor (page 4)

Describes my experience ________________ Doesn't describe my experience

Accurate ________________ Inaccurate

Support in the Work Setting (pages 4 and 5)

Describes my experience ________________ Doesn't describe my experience

Accurate ________________ Inaccurate

Adults' Judgment of the College Experience (page 5)

Describes my experience ________________ Doesn't describe my experience

Accurate ________________ Inaccurate

Nature of the Institution (pages 5 and 6 and 7)

Describes my experience ________________ Doesn't describe my experience

Accurate ________________ Inaccurate

The Adult Learner Context (page 7)

Describes my experience ________________ Doesn't describe my experience

Accurate ________________ Inaccurate

Mastering the Material (pages 8 and 9)

Describes my experience ________________ Doesn't describe my experience

Accurate ________________ Inaccurate

Linking Academic and Practical Knowledge (page 9)

Describes my experience ________________ Doesn't describe my experience

Accurate ________________ Inaccurate

Student Perspectives of Classroom Evaluation (pages 9 and 10)

Describes my experience ________________ Doesn't describe my experience

Accurate ________________ Inaccurate

Describes my experience ________________ Doesn't describe my experience

Accurate ________________ Inaccurate

If you said something was INACCURATE, please give the page number and indicate what should be changed.

What would you add that wasn't mentioned?

We appreciate your help in this research project. THANK YOU!

Appendix K

SAMPLE
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I. DESCRIPTIVE BACKGROUND DATA

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION/TYPICAL WEEK

I am interested in the various activities, involvements, and responsibilities you commonly experience each week.

1. **Please describe your current work situation, position, responsibilities, and time commitments.**
2. **Please describe your family roles and responsibilities.**
3. **Do you have any other time commitments such as church involvement, professional/civic activities or children's sports programs? Please describe them.**
4. **Think back to a time when you weren't in college. What were your life activities like then?**

B. BACKGROUND INFORMATION/EDUCATIONAL HISTORY AND MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS

1. **I am interested in key milestones in your life that have affected your educational journey since you left high school.**
    a. **Please describe yourself as you were when you left high school.**
    b. **After high school, what was the first significant event or change in your life?**
    c. **Tell me about your experiences in education/higher education.**
        (1) **For each education experience, indicate:**
            Approximate year of entry
            Major
            Name of institution
            Reasons for entry

(2) Think about one of your first classes and talk about what that was like.

(3) Any difficulties as an adult in becoming a student at that institution

(4) Things that stand out about this student experience [The most positive significant experiences during that enrollment/the most negative]

(5) Reason(s) for leaving

2. I am interested in the key positive and negative forces/factors that have influenced your entry and continuation as a student at this institution.

   a. Please describe the key positive forces which have supported you in your student role.

   b. Please describe the key negative forces which have made it difficult to be a student.

   c. Would you say that you enjoy/do not enjoy being a college student right now?

II. INTERVIEW PROBES:

A. SUPPORT SYSTEMS:

1. Adult students have key people in their lives that provide support/ do not provide support in various ways. Can you describe how key people affect your life as a student:

   Spouse/significant other/children
   Parents/siblings
   Friends
   Work colleagues/supervisor (financial and other types of support)
   Faculty/staff/students at this institution
   [Descriptive background: Do you meet with anyone from campus for activities outside the classroom? Are you involved in any student clubs or organizations?]

2. What are the key motivators that keep you going in pursuit of a degree?

B. THE CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

1. What is a good professor/instructor for you?

2. What is a good student?

3. If I were to observe you in a classroom, where would you be located? What would you be doing?

4. Do you think you are involved in the classroom, in the learning experience, differently from the younger students? Do you see yourself as different from other adult students?

5. Do you see differences [or believe there are differences] between the traditional classroom and an all-adult classroom?

6. Do you think that your instructor(s) treat adult students differently than younger students?

7. Do you value a syllabus? How do you use it?

8. How do you master the subject matter of a course? [Do you do additional reading, or try to learn on your own in ways that go beyond the course requirements?] Do you study with others? fellow students? family members?

9. Do you like to be evaluated in your classes? Are grades important? Do you see yourself evaluating your learning in a different way than the teacher does/did?

10. What do you think about academic advising?

C. EXTENDED LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

1. I am interested in whether you see your classroom experiences influencing other parts of your life or whether your life activities outside the classroom affect your learning while in class.

    a. Have you found that you have taken experiences or questions from your work role, family role, or citizen role into the classroom setting?

    b. Have you found any transfer of information from your classes into your current work role or family role?

2. Adults sometimes see the classroom as a step along the way toward a goal or goals that they have in mind. They would like to use the classroom experience in a specific way(s).

    a. Do you believe that you have made some of your classes work for you?

    b. If you could choose between a college class with learning activities you designed for yourself and one directed by a teacher, which would you choose and why?

    c. Would you like to pursue your entire undergraduate program in a self learning fashion? Why or why not?

3. You've heard the phrase 'Is there life beyond the classroom?' We know there is—and clearly we learn things in life outside the classroom.

   Do you plan learning activities to reach goals in your 'everyday' life beyond the classroom?

D. DESCRIPTIVE JUDGEMENTS OF COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

1. Please describe your most positive and most negative experiences here at this college/university.
2. If you could change the college/university, what would you do to make it a better place for adult undergraduates?
3. Do you have an interest in pursuing another degree after completion of this degree? Why?

E. CLOSING

Is there anything else you want to say about the adult undergraduate experience?

Appendix L

DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND ON STUDY PARTICIPANTS

To gain background information on each of the participants, a demographic sheet was created for administration during the interview process. This sheet was presented to each participant after discussion of the nature of the study and the consent form was signed. After completion of the sheet, each participant was interviewed, and in many cases the responses on this sheet were further discussed within the interview to clarify areas of interest.

This demographic sheet was designed to gather information on 1) basic demographic background characteristics of the participant, 2) key areas of current activities, commitments, and relationship supports of the individual, and 3) personal referent points for later discussion of activities and relationship supports within the interview process. The demographic sheet was designed and pilot-tested in the first months of the project. For the majority of participants, this sheet proved to be an efficient way to gather basic data. During several of the interviews, individuals noted that they had either interpreted the requested information on the demographic sheet in a different way, or had difficulty responding to a particular question because of their changing life circumstances. These difficulties were clarified during the course of the interview.

The following report presents the data from the Demographic sheet aggregated by institutional site. The elements presented include:

Category I - Demographic Data:

Gender, Marital Status, Ethnicity, Academic Classification Status, Age, Number of hours of current course load, Academic major, Job Title, Full or Part-time work commitment, Comment on current status if not employed, and Reasons for selection of academic institution/program.

Category II. Activities and Support Assistance:

Current campus services used, Categories of individuals who provide support/assistance to the individual in the student role, Sources of financial support for tuition and school expenses, Areas of activity which have changed at work because of student role, Current primary caregiver for select individuals, Areas of activity which have change in their participation in community activities because of student role, Current participation in campus activities.

ADULTS AS UNDERGRADUATES
DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

COMPILATION

(1) Please circle the appropriate choice:

(a) Male Female

(b) Married Single Divorced Widowed Other

(c) Caucasian African-American Hispanic Asian Other

(d) Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

(a) Gender

	Male	Female	Totals
Allerton	10	10	20
Bayville	8	7	15
Charles	8	10	18
Delta	5	5	10
Elmwood	8	6	14
Fremont	5	8	13
		Total	90

(b) Marital Status

	Married	Divorced	Single	Other	Widowed	No Response
Allerton	13	5	2	0	0	0
Bayville	7	6	1	0	0	1
Charles	14	4	0	0	0	0
Delta	7	1	1	0	0	1
Elmwood	6	2	5	1	0	0
Fremont	7	2	3	0	1	0

(c) Race

	Caucasian	African-American	Hispanic	Asian	Other
Allerton	19	1	0	0	0
Bayville	15	0	0	0	0
Charles	15	2	0	1	0
Delta	8	1	1	0	0
Elmwood	9	4	0	0	1 (Int'l)
Fremont	9	3	1	0	0

(d) Academic status

	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Graduate*	No Response
Allerton	0	0	3	13	4	0
Bayville	1	10	2	0	0	2
Charles	0	0	8	6	1	3
Delta	0	2	6	1	0	1
Elmwood	2	8	0	0	1	3
Fremont	2	6	3	1	0	1

* Interviewed at time of graduation or early in semester following graduation.

(2) Please fill in the blanks:

(a) Age _________

	Range	Median	Mean
Allerton	27-51	37	36
Bayville	31-59	41	42
Charles	32-48	41	39
Delta	32-47	36	38
Elmwood	30-51	34	35
Fremont	31-47	35	38
Total Avg.	**30-51**	**37**	**38**

(b) Number of hours (current course load) ____________

	Current Course load (hrs.)	No. of entries	Most Common Course load
Allerton	12	13	
	13	2	12 Hours *Full-time course load at Allerton was 12 hrs.
	No response	3	
	* Full-time	2	
Bayville	3	1	
	4	1	
	7	1	
	9	1	
	11	2	
	12	2	11-15 Hours
	13	3	
	14	3	
	15	1	

Charles	3	3	
	6	10	
	9	2	6-9 Hours
	10	1	
	12	2	
Delta	4	1	
	6	4	
	8	1	
	13	1	6 Hours
	15	1	
	18	1	
	no response	1	
Elmwood	3	2	
	5	5	
	6	1	
	10	1	5-12 Hours
	12	2	
	13	1	
	14	1	
	no response	1	
Fremont	4	3	
	5	1	
	6	2	4-8 Hours (7)
	8	1	12-15 Hours (6)
	12	2	
	13	2	
	15	2	

(c) Academic major ______________________

Allerton:
applied organizational management (12)
business
business mgmt. (2)
management (4)

Bayville:
accounting
business/accounting
business management
business/statistics
civil engineering
CST math/science
English
general
industrial engineering
marketing
math
nursing (2)
pre-engineering
psychology

Charles:
accounting (7)
accounting/computer
business
business/accounting
business administration (6)
computer information systems (2)

Delta:
accounting
business education
civil engineering/industrial technology (CEIT)
economics
electrical engineering
elementary education (2)
history
human services
psychology

Elmwood:
accounting
arts (ceramics)
chemistry
communications/journalism
computer science
elementary education
engineering/math
health care
mechanical engineering
nursing
pharmacy
psychology
transfer (2)

Fremont:
electrical/computer engineering
electrical engineering
environmental science
general business
graphic design
human services
industrial training
nursing
speech communication (2)
TAE, industrial training
theater
wildlife conservation management

(d) Job Title ______________________

Allerton:
area production supervisor
computer analyst
detailer
electrician
engineering supervisor
health/safety coordinator
manager, financial analysis & reporting
officer manager
production supervisor
program assistant
quality specialist
records clerk
reports & data clerk
sales representative
shop supervisor
senior systems manager
senior accounting associate
systems analyst
technical information technician

Bayville:
work-study
lunchroom manager

scuba diver instruct
project manager
secretary/treasurer
student
math tutor

Charles:
401k loan administrator
administrative accountant
assistant manager
assistant staff manager
bookkeeper
cash accounting clerk
construction project manager
customer master file
director of materials
housing coordinator
materials auditor
manager of technical services
news director, WBT
nuclear security officer
parent/home teacher
software analyst
technical specialist
vice president

Delta:
administrative secretary
carpenter
chemical dependency treatment counselor
division representative Local 850 [union]
none (3)
part time child care
preschool/lead teacher
technical assistant

Elmwood:
administrative assistant
building maintenance
distribution clerk
drive/dispatcher
electronic technician
housekeeping
lock box processor
n/a (2)
plant worker
production specialist, tv/radio
radio announcer
route salesperson
safety/security officer

Fremont:
receptionist/filing
data processing specialist

executive secretary
maintenance planner
pipefitter/video route
programmer/analyst
registered nurse
ski technician/sales
student (4)
word processor

(d) Full or Part-time ____________________[EMPLOYMENT STATUS]

	Full-time	Part-time	No Response	N/A
Allerton	19	0	1	
Bayville	6	3	6	
Charles	16	1	1	
Delta	2	6	2	
Elmwood	9	3	2	
Fremont	5	4	2	2

(e) If not formally employed, please indicate current status:

Allerton: unemployed (1); n/a (1); no response (18)

Bayville: disabled, full-time student (1); full-time student (2); homemaker (1); housewife (1); working musician (1); no response (10)

Charles: currently unemployed (1); n/a (2); parent/ home school teacher (1); no response (16)

Delta: stay-at-home man (1); currently laid off (1); homemaker (1); household/son (1); no response (6)

Elmwood: housewife (1); living on alimony (1); no response 12

Fremont full-time student (1); full time student/mother (1); pipefitter, video route, etc. (several pt jobs) (1); retired (1); student/housewife (1); no response (8)

(f) Reasons for selecting this academic institution/program:

Allerton: Class sequence - accelerated program.
Fast-paced, convenience, referrals, advertisements, program for working adults, class times.

I like the one subject at a time program [Allerton] offers. Several people I know had taken the B.S. A.O.M. program and recommended it.

Because of the time it takes to get your degree, if you have 60 semester hours.

To obtain a degree in management.

Because of the time it would take me to obtain a college degree.

Recommended by friends; 15-month time frame was easier to swallow than the 7-8 years it would have taken at UT at one class per semester.

[Allerton] is an efficient avenue for completing my undergraduate degree. It allows time for other priorities, such as career and family. Its nontraditional structure (i.e., classes one evening a week) fits into my schedule.

Fast-paced program with low classroom hours leading to B.S. in 15 months.

Time schedule for classes; completion time of program.

Time required to complete a degree in area of interest.

Short length of program; challenge.

Accelerated pace of curriculum; nature of program (for working adults); design of program (small classes, same classmates throughout).

The program was accelerated and met my hours.

The program at [Allerton] allowed me to finish my education quickly. (Will be permanently laid off in one month.)

Course work applicable to my work; observation of successful graduates; class schedule, evenings, etc.

Recommended by other personnel within my company and highly supported by my company.

Accelerated program aimed toward working adults.

Time, accelerated.

College was willing to accept all previous college credits toward graduation. Convenient for a commuter student / full-time worker. No 'hassles' associated with university.

Bayville: Because it is close to home and an excellent school.

I feel that [Bayville] is a good institution, and I have received the help I need in all areas.

Cost.

Convenience; cost; faculty and staff; transfer agreement.

My girls were attending in '86; small.

Economics; diversity of classes offered.

The school is smaller than U.T. and I felt to start out with a smaller school would be best.

I am paying the costs of my education. I chose the transfer program here because of lower costs. I also felt I would do better academically in a smaller class environment.

Night classes available; civil engineering is my field of work.

I would like to get into Christian counseling.

Good location.

I felt there would be a better chance of success in a 4-year institution when I transfer. (Given facts concerning J.C. transfers and success in a 4-year program vs. those starting at a 4-year college.)

To get a two-year degree and then return to work environment.

Convenience.

Interest in computer and need of a good job.

Charles: [Charles] Adult Alternative College program is more conducive for the adult student. My experience at the previous university (Delta) consisted of a lot of stress and juggling between school and other concerns.

Commitment to adult learners; support systems; belief that [Charles] wants me to succeed.

Close to work; course selections; time offered and choices more acceptable for my needs; fellow employees attended [Charles].

Availability of night classes; smaller class sizes.

Close to job site; recommendation of friend.

Close to work and home.

Location; class size.

[Charles] has an excellent reputation in the community for quality education. The New College at [Charles] especially meets the needs of the adult, working student. The business administration program gives me exposure to business courses that apply

All courses offered at night; location.

Convenience and continuity of necessary courses required.

Want to improve myself as a person and a professional. Would like to eventually have an investigative firm.

The fame of the new college program for adult students and the challenge of pursuing college studies again. Also, the [Charles] community was very accepting and helpful.

Reputation.

Had the program I wanted at a cost I could afford and was local to where I live.

Small, liberal arts; anticipated close relationship with faculty; good reputation; limited choices in/near Charlotte; took all of my transfer credits - 60.

It is unique in offering degree programs during nights/weekends; college's reputation; college's location.

The time when classes are held is convenient. Other schools do not accommodate people who work days.

Several family members attended [Charles]; close to home; excellent teachers; small classes.

Delta: Convenience (I work here). Business is my field.

Closest to home.

Location.

It is financially what I can afford and I have friends who have gone back to (school) and graduated from here (moral support).

Wanted a 4-year degree; location.

Just something for me. It just so happens to help at work as well. Closeness to relatives.

Location; long-term association with Athletic Foundation.

Convenience and reputation for having good engineering program.

The human services program is most closely related to my field of work [as a chemical dependency treatment consultant].

Elmwood: Close to home; good academics; reasonable expense.

Financial/location.

Nearby - location; good ceramics program; small classes; inexpensive.

I figured out start[ing] with a community college like Elmwood, you can get all the help you can and more attention. And, people are willing to listen and help.

Location; program.

It is an excellent school, and is also very close to home.

Location; reputation; cost.

Reasons for selecting [Elmwood]: a good transfer program to Delta. Better one-on-one work and less money to pay for classes.

I conducted a study of projected career opportunities through the next 20 years and found a need in this area of study. [I chose] [Elmwood] because of tuition cost, academic standing, and user friendliness.

Good reputation.

Cost; location; academic standing. The program selected was due to a strong interest in the field.

(1) Broad spectrum of course[s] offered; (2) frequency [of] courses offered.

This is the only school compatible with my job.

Expenses; travel time; job.

Fremont: Hometown; art program availability.

[Fremont] pays for 2 classes per semester.
Location; academic program.

Because I live here.

Speech communication involves/combines those areas/subjects which appeal to me most — psychology — every aspect of communication - verbal, non-verbal, group, etc.

I relocated to East Tennessee for employment purposes and look into [Fremont] soon after. I was pleased to discover the wildlife program.

Wanted to [do] something other than computer science and this area relates to my present occupation.

Location of institution; interest in the education program in industrial training; the academic history of the school.

Proximity to work location; reputation.

Close to home; good institution.

I attended [Fremont] earlier. It is close to home and has a varied academic offering.

Because of the school's academic history and because of relocation to this area.

Goes with my natural abilities and desires.

(3) Please circle ALL that apply:

(a) Which of the following campus services have you used?

admissions
library
student health
registration
advisement
career placement
financial aid
counseling
other ________

	Allerton	Bayville	Charles	Delta	Elmwood	Fremont
Admissions	19	14	17	10	14	13
Library	14	14	17	10	14	11
Student Health	0	1	2	6	0	3
Registrar	19	15	18	10	13	12
Advising	8	12	9	8	9	8
Placement	1	4	0	0	1	1
Fin. Aid	6	9	6	2	4	3
Counseling	2	5	3	3	9	2

Other:

Allerton: (1) bookstore

Bayville: (1) no evening math lab

Charles: (no comments)

Delta: (1) non-traditional student program; (1) international services

Elmwood: (1) student life services

Fremont: (1) foreign studies

(b) Who provides support/assistance to you in your student role?

child/children spouse parents

siblings friends fellow students

employer work colleagues faculty

campus personnel other __________

	Allerton	Bayville	Charles	Delta	Elmwood	Fremont
Child/ children	6	8	6	7	4	6
Siblings	2	2	3	3	1	5
Employer	12	0	15	3	2	6
Campus personnel	6	2	4	2	2	0
Spouse	11	6	13	7	6	6
Friends	11	8	10	7	6	7
Colleagues	10	0	10	5	1	3
Parents	6	3	6	6	6	6
Fellow students	11	8	11	3	3	5
Faculty	9	4	13	5	5	4

Other: Allerton: (1) yes

Bayville: (1) girlfriend

Charles: (1) Ginter Fellowship

Delta: (1) in-laws

Elmwood: (1) desire; (1) employer; (1) financial aid

Fremont: (1) none

(c) How are you paying for tuition and school expenses?

loans scholarships employer assistance

savings personal earnings spouse

parent(s) other __________

	Allerton	Bayville	Charles	Delta	Elmwood	Fremont
Loans	5	2	2	2	1	1
Savings	2	2	1	3	1	2
Parent(s)	2	1	1	0	0	1
Scholarships	0	5	2	1	1	0
Personal earnings	6	4	9	5	13	5
Employer Assist.	16	0	14	2	2	4
Spouse	0	5	1	5	3	3

Other:

Allerton:	(1) VA; (1) self
Bayville:	(1) Pell Grant; (1) financial aid; (2) unspecified
Charles:	(1) grants
Delta:	(1) VA; (1) credit card
Elmwood:	(1) VA
Fremont:	(1) financial aid; (1) VA; (1) Pell Grant; (1) reserves/ retirement

(d) Have things changed at work because of your student role?

job responsibilities	number of hours worked
work related travel	relationships with work colleagues
involvement in new projects	other ________________

	Allerton	Bayville	Charles	Delta	Elmwood	Fremont
Job responsibilities	4	0	6	3	3	2
Work-related travel	3	0	2	2	0	2

New projects	5	1	7	2	0	0
# of hours worked	6	2	4	4	4	3
Collegial relations	2	0	5	2	2	1

Other:

Allerton: (1) less overtime

Bayville: (1) rearranged hours

Charles: (1) no change; (1) nothing

Delta: (1) being part-time instead of full-time; (1) happier at home; (1) more hectic; (1) not really; (1) part-time work not allowed

Elmwood: (1) interests/time; (1) none; (1) student discrimination

Fremont: (1) all apply; (1) makeup class; (1) n/a; (1) time schedule change

(e) Are you the primary caregiver for:

child/children parents other family members

others ____________________

	Allerton	Bayville	Charles	Delta	Elmwood	Fremont
Child/ children	7	9	13	8	5	7
Parents	1	0	1	0	1	2
Other family	0	1	0	0	2	1

(f) Have you changed your participation in any of the following community activities since you became a student?

church

leadership roles

children's extracurricular activities

volunteer service

community organizations

neighborhood activities

other ________________________________

	Allerton	Bayville	Charles	Delta	Elmwood	Fremont
Church	3	5	6	3	6	3
Leadership roles	2	2	7	2	3	3
Children's activities	6	5	7	2	2	3
Volunteer services	1	6	5	2	4	4
Community organiz.	2	3	3	0	1	1
Neighborhood activities	1	2	3	0	3	2

Other:

Allerton	(1) less social life; (1) none; (1) professional organizations
Bayville:	1) community activities / class; (1) hobbies (1) yes
Charles:	(1) yes
Delta:	(1) us
Elmwood:	(2) no; (1) no time
Fremont:	(1) job; (2) no; (1) not enough time

(4) Please circle:

Do you participate in campus activities outside of the classroom?

Yes No

	Yes	No	No Response
Allerton	4	15	1
Bayville	9	5	1
Charles	4	14	0
Delta	3	7	0
Elmwood	5	9	0
Fremont	2	11	0
	27	61	2

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